

AP
2
C385

THE
CENTENNIAL
REVIEW
of Arts & Science



VOLUME IV • 1960

The Centennial Review of Arts & Science is a magazine of the liberal arts, issued quarterly by the College of Science and Arts, Michigan State University.

EDITOR:

Herbert Weisinger

MANAGING EDITOR:

Inez Hare

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:

Herman R. Struck

DESIGNER:

Charles Pollock

Editorial Board

| | | | |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Iwao Ishino | ANTHROPOLOGY | Chas. Hirschfeld | HUMANITIES |
| Allen Leepa | ART | Leo Katz | MATHEMATICS |
| Robert S. Bandurski | BOTANY | Hans Nathan | MUSIC |
| Max T. Rogers | CHEMISTRY | John F. A. Taylor | PHILOSOPHY |
| John P. Henderson | ECONOMICS | Richard Schlegel | PHYSICS |
| Milosh Muntyan | EDUCATION | Arthur J. M. Smith | POETRY |
| Bernard I. Duffey | ENGLISH | Alfred G. Meyer | POLITICAL |
| Clarence L. Vinge | GEOGRAPHY | | SCIENCE |
| James W. Trow | GEOLOGY | Milton Rokeach | PSYCHOLOGY |
| Arthur E. Adams | HISTORY | Petr B. Fischer | RELIGION |
| Ralph W. Lewis | HISTORY OF | William H. Form | SOCIOLOGY |
| | SCIENCE | John R. Shaver | ZOOLOGY |

Editorial Consultants

Branford P. Millar, Portland State College **CHAIRMAN**
 Allen S. Weller, University of Illinois **ART**
 George W. Beadle, California Institute of
 Technology **BIOLOGY**
 William H. McNeill, University of Chicago **HISTORY**
 Douglas Bush, Harvard University **LITERATURE**
 Donald J. Grout, Cornell University **MUSIC**
 Philip Morrison, Cornell University **PHYSICS**

The Centennial Review disclaims responsibility for statements of fact or opinion made by contributors. The magazine is published under the direction of the Dean of the College of Science and Arts, Lloyd C. Ferguson; it is not an official publication of Michigan State University, and the views expressed in it are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University or the College.

Subscription rates are \$3.00 a year; \$5.00 for two years; \$1.00 for single copies. Manuscripts may not be returned unless accompanied by stamped and self-addressed envelope; the submission of two copies will greatly facilitate appraisal. All communications and subscriptions should be addressed to the editor at 204 Morrill Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Retail distribution: B. DeBoer, Selected Outlets, 102 Beverly Rd., Bloomfield, New Jersey. Second-class postage paid at East Lansing, Michigan.

Copyright 1960 by The Centennial Review of Arts & Science.



S
to

(
b
i
e
u
t
a
c
o
n
c
i
s
i
o
n
c

Sweeney: . . . But I've gotta use words when I talk to you.—Eliot, *Fragment of an Agon*.

POETRY, LANGUAGE, AND THE CONDITION OF MODERN MAN

Sigurd Burckhardt
and
Roy Harvey Pearce

(The following two papers, the first by Burckhardt and the second by Pearce, were conceived of and delivered as a pair. We were invited to say something about poetry, by way of justifying its existence, to a group of philosophers. That we should have been asked to do so, and in such terms, we took as yet another indication of the fragmentation of modern culture—wherein critics and historians, like philosophers, are compelled continually to assume the role of apologists for the objects of their study. We decided therefore to attempt to justify the poet's, particularly the modern poet's, way with language as it might throw light on the origin and meaning of that fragmentation. What issued was a kind of lay-sermon, which moves from a close examination of some texts-for-the-day to a general exposition of the topic. The papers are thus meant to be read in the order in which they are here printed.—The Authors)

Sigurd Burckhardt

I

ONE COULD WRITE the history of poetry and science in two ways; like the history of the Roman Empire, it may be told either as a series of conquests or as a series of defenses. The Romans avoided the word "conquest"; they preferred "pacification." They found that their boundaries, wherever they were, had a way of disintegrating; the only remedy was to

pacify the area outside the boundaries. In this way Rome expanded in sheer self-defense. It is similar with science and literature; and if the Romans' plea of self-defense strikes us as a little disingenuous, scientists and poets, considering the meagre awards that await them, could enter it with a good deal of justice, though in fact, since their consciences are clean, they rather think of their expansions as conquests. Scientists—and, I believe, poets too—are engaged in a continuous effort to restore unity and cohesion to a universe—whether of matter or of discourse—which is always threatened with disintegration. The great scientific theories are constructs designed to reestablish universal harmony by the conquest and incorporation of troublesome new data which the existing order had ignored and which are threatening to throw the whole proud structure into confusion. And it is not surprising that a cosmos which has progressed from the primordial egg through Ptolemaic spheres to an expanding universe demands constructs of a more and more abstract and remote order, if it is to stay (conceptually, at any rate) in one piece. It is equally evident that a human community which has progressed from our paradisaal parents through the Polis and Urbs to the Lonely Crowd should require, as at least one of its ties, a language increasingly remote from the careless and carefree certainties of every-day discourse. Just as the scientist, charged with keeping the material universe intelligible, is, from a common-sense point of view, absurdly sensitive to minute data which call the grand existing order into question, so the poet is inordinately aware of any evidence that human communion—through language—is perhaps only an illusion; that language itself, once it is deprived of its external props, may be merely a vast game of question-begging, in which we presuppose the community which we pretend to establish by speaking. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* remains the classic document, as disquieting as it is delightful, of the ludicrous arbitrariness and solitariness of

our separate minds, and of the inadequacy of ordinary language to bridge the chasm between them.

Language—which for most of us is a convenience—is the poet's be-all and end-all; that is why he cannot rest satisfied with weeping or laughing over our trust in it. Improbably he must try to get the better of it, to provide the constructs which, however indirectly and abstractly, show that language *can* be unequivocal. And while he sorrows, rejoices, prophesies, or celebrates love and beauty in full creative freedom, to this one task he is bound; whatever he is talking *about*, the very mode of his talking is a commentary on language and an attempt to overcome its paradoxes. In the end, it is for this servitude that he is rewarded and, if necessary, absolved. Time, W. H. Auden writes in his elegy on Yeats:

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.

Time, that with this strange excuse
Pardoned Kipling and his views,
And will pardon Paul Claudel,
Pardons him for writing well.

It is because poetry is, in the most radical sense, "language in action" that we cannot fully understand it except as an address, a mode of discourse, something said by someone to someone in such a way as to be unequivocal. Poetry applies the severest test to the casual assurance of its time that language is a communion; but at the same time it tries to show how language must be spoken to *be* a communion.

II

By way of showing how poets respond to the threat of disintegration, to the awareness that traditional harmonies and cohesions are no longer to be relied on, I should like to con-

sider three poems, all on the same subject but far apart in time and in form. The first is Robert Herrick's *To Daffodils*:

1. Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
 You haste away so soon:
 As yet the early-rising Sun
 Has not attain'd his Noon.
 Stay, stay
 Until the hasting day
 Has run
 But to the Even-song;
 And, having prayed together, we
 Will go with you along.

2. We have short time to stay, as you,
 We have as short a spring;
 As quick a growth to meet Decay,
 As you or anything.
 We die,
 As your hours do, and dry
 Away,
 Like to the Summer's rain;
 Or as the pearls of Morning's dew
 Ne'er to be found again.

This apostrophe to flowers is perhaps a song rather than a poem; it may be a violence to strip it of its musical envelopment. Still I think we are safe in noting two things about it as significant: that daffodils are being addressed, and that the stanzaic pattern is forbiddingly complex. The subject itself—the analogy between human and floral life—is a topos as old as the Bible; the basic rhetorical figure—the apostrophe—is equally old. But the tone is singular: a pleading, at times almost hectic, to the flowers to acknowledge the relationship which alone can make the direct address meaningful. The point in history at which an address to inanimate things ceased to be taken literally and became figurative lies in the dim past; but the point at which such an apostrophe is felt to be a positive incongruity, an artifice no longer re-

concilable with the speaker's sense of reality, is very much more recent and varies from person to person, perhaps from mood to mood. Herrick, I think, reaches that point in this poem. To trace out rhyme schemes is no longer fashionable critical practice, but here we need one, because the poem is a rhymers's tour de force; it stretches almost to the breaking point our capacity for hearing the tonal correspondencies. As the speaker has difficulty in believing that human and inanimate nature are still sufficiently of a piece to talk to each other, so we have difficulty in hearing that the lines of the poem fully answer each other. German has an expressive term for lines which, in generally rhymed stanzas, remain without the fulfillment of an answering line; it calls them "orphans." There are two near-orphans in Herrick's stanza: the first and the ninth lines. Is it altogether an accident that it is the word "we" at the end of line 9 which stands in this position of almost complete bereavement (and pronounced syntactical isolation), harking back to an answering echo that has become almost too faint to hear? And again, is it an accident that in line 6 of the second stanza the flow of the verse, until then easy though varied, becomes disturbed and clogged through the juxtaposition of the words "your hours"? "Hours" itself is wilful; from the logic of the analogy we should expect a simple "you." But if we consider "hours" as a pun on the first-person-plural possessive, we see that the disturbance arises from the too close joining of the two pronouns—"we" and "you"—to join which would have seemed the very point of the poem.

We might say, then, that the poem is a splendid farewell to itself, or to its mode. This particular kind of grace, of madrigal lightness and intricacy, does not, I believe, recur in English poetry. The faith in the universal harmony of all creation, which ought to be the real substratum for such modes of speech, is only a charming fiction. And though there is hardly a limit to the fictions the poet may permit

himself, fictions about his medium are forbidden him upon pain of poetic death. What makes this poem live—as the anthologies show it does—is not the fiction but rather the poet's awareness of it *as* a fiction. Because an apostrophe is a figure of *speech* in the most literal sense, and because the poet is the most conscious and responsible of speakers, he knows himself committed to something untenable, something beautiful but already beyond recall; the "Stay, stay" calls out not only to the daffodils in the first line, but also to those in the title—that is, to the poem as a whole.

Two and a half centuries separate Hopkins' elegy from Herrick's, and they tell.

Spring and Fall

To a Young Child

Márgarét, are you grieving
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?
 Léaves, like the things of man, you
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
 Ah! ás the heart grows older
 It will come to such sights colder
 By and by, nor spare a sigh
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
 And yet you will weep and know why.
 Now no matter, child, the name:
 Sórrow's springs áre the same.
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
 What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
 It is the blight man was born for,
 It is Margaret you mourn for.

Now it is not the "we" of common humanity that speaks to flowers, but the poet who speaks to a child. The child responds to the falling of leaves somewhat as Herrick, speaking for all of us, does to the withering of the daffodils; but the poet initiates her into the harsher verities of human life and growth. He does not call Margaret's grief pointless, on the

contrary: he says that she is, by intuitive wisdom, grieving over the ineluctable future time when she will no longer grieve. Thus the poem translates into an adult sensibility the kind of correspondence which formed the already precarious base of Herrick's poem. To put it somewhat baroquely, Hopkins goes about his work with a compassionate severity, destroying the fairy-tale Goldengrove in which the child still finds the objective correlative of her sorrow, and leaving in its place worlds of wanwood, but on the other hand giving that sorrow a new dignity by showing it its true object: man's—Margaret's—self.

In this separation, words and images assume a particularity which they do not have in the earlier poem. Perhaps my interpretation of Herrick's "your hours" seemed a little strained; but if it occurred in this poem, my calling attention to it would, I daresay, seem quite natural, because it would be entirely of a piece with "heart heard, ghost guessed," with wanwood and leafmeal, etc. What I take to be the first sign of disintegration in Herrick has become the dominant formal feature in Hopkins; the words do not easily blend into the total utterance, but insistently call attention to themselves as entities, as particulars, which the meter, moreover, compels us to linger over and take in fully.

This means that Hopkins has drawn the linguistic consequences of his knowledge. The relative ease with which we read Herrick's poem derives from the sense of correspondence which still structures it: where Nature is in tune with man's feelings, language need not carry a very heavy burden; the greater, encompassing harmony is pre-established, as it were. Call this harmony into question, as Hopkins does, and the burden on language immediately becomes greater. It has to exert itself to hold things together; we can see the alliterative tendons straining.

But something has been gained by the loss; as man has been turned in upon himself, so has language. In being forced to

structure itself more rigorously from within, it has gained a new resilience. I will risk the assertion that the rhyme of the final couplet would have been impossible before Hopkins, except where the intention was comic; it has so work-a-day a cadence that it seems, or did seem, unavailable to serious lyric poetry. Here however, it does its work with dignity and even poignancy. Why? Mostly, I think, because the poem as a whole has prepared us to accept words as particulars, with an inherent worth. Perhaps it is a blight which has turned Goldengrove into wanwood and splendid phrases like "pearls of morning's dew" into "It is Margaret you mourn for." (Margaret, by the way, is Greek for "pearl.") But it is the human lot and the human phrase, as moving in their way as any beautiful but false compare.

That this conquest of a new linguistic province for poetry has not been a matter of course, we see from the strange second couplet. Why this painfully contorted sentence, which seems to yield nothing but a strained and inharmonious rhyme? My guess is that the principle of contortion is not a "poetic" one, in the common acceptance of that much abused term, but a purely linguistic—and thus a *truly* poetic—one. The sentence creates no effect that would speak immediately to our feelings (unless we have learned to *feel* language, as the poet does); what it does is to crowd together, at the beginning, all its nominal elements and to relegate the verbal elements to the end. Is not the point of this to show the linguistic impossibility of that pristine innocence and sense of harmony in which all things stand side by side, inviolate, substantial and yet intimately related?—a harmony so unbroken that there is no subject lording it over an object and no verb to intervene between the two, relating only what itself has separated? In a sense, the child's inarticulate, ineffable intuition of coherence is true; but the poet knows, more keenly than anyone else, that what cannot be said cannot, humanly speaking, be true. And yet it seems that what *can* be said

must be false. It is at this point that the final and "vulgar" phrasing comes to the poet's rescue. In "the blight man was born for" and "Margaret you mourn for"—already anticipated in the "care for" of line 4—the form of statement which before was all but unintelligible becomes available; in a curious way subject and object have become one, and no verb separates the substantives. There has been a price to pay: the truth of language is man's truth; its limitations are man's blight; the pathetic fallacy is, humanly speaking, just that—a fallacy. But at least the truth of man's fellowship and common fate can be wrested from language, and that, as the poem proves, is no mean triumph.

The Course of a Particular.

Wallace Stevens

Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind,
Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less.
It is still full of icy shades and shapen snow.

The leaves cry . . . One holds off and merely hears the cry.
It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
And though one says that one is part of everything,

There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
And being part is an exertion that declines:
One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.

The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,

In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all.

If we were asked to supply a title for Stevens' poem, it is a safe guess that we would not hit on the one chosen by the poet. Herrick's title adds nothing to our understanding which

we would not know after reading the first two words of the poem; Hopkins' we might guess and do at least not puzzle over. But I doubt that we could read Stevens' poem correctly without the pointer supplied in the title; even with it it is difficult enough. This means, surely, that a confidence has become still more shaky: the confidence, let us say, of the apostrophe, of the direct address; the trust that the poet will be understood, because his voice is the common voice of man. Where Herrick says "we" and speaks to Nature and where Hopkins says "you" and speaks to a child, Stevens says not even "I" but "one"; and if he speaks to anyone, it is with a mediacy and from an isolation so great that he is bound to be diffident about being understood at all. Hence the starkly abstract title, a warning that what follows will speak for itself with an uncompromising absoluteness.

The "particular" that runs its course through the poem is the cry of the leaves—or perhaps, more cautiously, "the leaves cry." The course itself is a merciless stripping, a structured and mounting negation, until we have the thing "itself," untranscending, uncommunicative, cut off from all connection with gods, heroes, man, and even, so it seems, with that impersonal "one," who has no attributes left except the rapidly failing ability to hear and the ebbing will to be part. At first the leaves cry in a setting, temporal and spatial; but, bleak as the setting is, it is too much, is got rid of. The phrase itself must speak, or rather cry . . . what, or to whom? The "one" hearer lacks the energy and resists the temptation to hear more than is said—and nothing *is* said. The meaning of the cry would have to be contributed by the "one" and to do so would not only be an exertion, but a violation of the truth of the thing, the cry, itself. And so, finally, the particular stands naked, separate, intransitive, closed off by a full stop. It has become absolutely itself.

In this minimal integrity, the particular has to counterbalance a heavy bulk of statement—statement which, except

in the first stanza, is weighed down with bureaucratic jargon. Compared with "concerning someone else," "there is a resistance involved," or "in the absence of," Hopkins' "It is Margaret you mourn for" seems the essence of purity. And so does the particular—"the leaves cry"—itself. We get the feeling that to say more than this barest of sentences is already too much, too risky, involving us, on the one hand, in fantasias of togetherness and on the other in a mode of speech so drained of all concreteness and felt reality that it seems to issue from a Hartford, Conn., office building. Anything that might smack of artifice, of vividness, is stringently avoided; even images are too much, it seems, because the human mind is so constituted that it takes images as metaphors and finds a specious consolation in the sense that things have, after all, a meaning, are related, cohere. It is this consolation Stevens deprives us of; he will not supply us with any props for our illusions. This is the language you speak, he seems to say, and consequently this is the way you are; it would be a lie to pretend that things are meaningful.

I do not, for my part, feel that the particular suffices to counterbalance the mass of negation, though I think that Stevens intends that it should. But in any case, what we have here is a poem of radical doubt and analysis, in which the poet tries to get to the minimal, the quantum of meaningful language, out of which to rebuild the universe of discourse. I do not believe that the final statement—"the cry concerns no one at all"—can be taken at face value, for in that case the poem, the act of speech which lastly it remains and through which it remains tied to the community of men, would be absurd. The only fully autonomous poetry is nonsense poetry. But perhaps the poet means to offer us a way out of this dilemma; we are to read "no one" not as "none," but as the negation of the "one" in stanzas 2 and 3, the "one" who holds off and resists being part. The stress, in other words, should be on the "one," so that the cry, not con-

cerning one, concerns all. This would imply that the ultimate negation is the ultimate affirmation, a somewhat uneasy conclusion since it is so blatantly paradoxical. Still I suggest it as the only one which does not reduce the poet's whole enterprise to nonesense.

I distrust the practice of assigning philosophical labels to poetry, but Stevens' stripping of language to the bare bones of statement is too obviously analogous to the existentialist's stripping man of all his attributes to be ignored. "The leaves cry" is the linguistic counterpart to the existentialist "I am"; we have here the same desperate search for the irreducible, the same will to take nothing for granted. We have observed the interiorisation of "form" from Herrick to Hopkins; with Stevens it has become pure structure. Rhyme, meter, richness of image and sound—all the devices which, being external and immediately perceptible emblems of order and splendor (however fleeting), affirm an ordered and in some sense splendid world outside of the poet's created act, a world within which he can act because he shares it with his audience—all these are no longer available. Traditionally, poetry has been in some way celebratory; however precarious the poet felt the possibility of communion to be, he celebrated the sense that it was still and once more possible. With Stevens—and much modern poetry—all the energy seems to be spent on the mere assertion that communion must be *made* possible. The act of creation has become absolute—and for this reason stark. By a curious but necessary paradox, the unlimited freedom of the absolute creator turns into the grimest kind of necessity; it is this paradox which Stevens' particular, in the counterplay of form and content, embodies. "The leaves cry" is, as an assertion, creatively sovereign; real leaves do not cry. But as a *form* of statement it is terrifyingly compelled; if less were said, it would no longer be a statement at all.

The point and poignancy, then, of Stevens' poem is that

it accepts, as ultimately binding, the obligation of human discourse, of statement. Elsewhere Stevens calls the poem "the cry of its occasion"; but this cry is not allowed to deteriorate into a "Howl" of despair or protest against the world. Meaninglessness—and howls, however charged with emotion, are in the strict sense meaningless—is the limit of speech, which the poet, at whatever cost of beauty or intensity, must stop short of. "Said words of the world are the life of the world"; the emphasis is on the "said," the human act which invests words with lifegiving meaning. What has thus been conquered is no more and no less than the threat of meaninglessness, which is far more formidable than the threat of falsification. Falsification Herrick could still afford to glance at, while Hopkins had to confront it fully. Of Stevens more is demanded. As Job would have found it consoling to believe that he had done something to deserve his misfortunes, because it is better to think oneself unjust than to think God capricious, so—if we can generalize from Stevens—the modern poet would find it consoling to believe that language condemned him to falsehood. For there is a way to expiate the falsehood of language—poetic form: "After great pain a formal feeling comes." But there is none I know of to conquer meaninglessness except to dare confront it and to forge meaning from it by an act which knows itself to be both frighteningly free and fully bound by the conditions of human discourse.

III

What I have tried to show is that and how, for the poet, the condition of language *is* the human condition, because what we call, loosely and metaphorically, the "meaning of our lives," he tests literally against the meaning of our discourse. A theory of meaning—whether explicit or implicit—is in fact a whole philosophy, because it stipulates the all-important third party who must be the guarantor of true communion.

Who or what guarantees that the meaning I attach to my words is the same as the meaning my listener derives from them? Is it a divinely pre-established harmony, a firmly and beautifully woven texture of creation, in which all creatures can have discourse with each other? Is it the more tenuous—I would say the Protestant—order, which still allows men the community of their fallen state, though the sense of *culpa* has swallowed up that of *felix*? Or is it that purely group-made, haphazardly enslaving system of mere habit, based upon a kind of probability calculus of communion, the order of jargon and slogan and conditioned response? For the poet the shift from Divine Providence to actuarial tables is a linguistic one.

In "Carrion Comfort," Hopkins cries: "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;/ Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man . . ." This is anything but confident or even elegiac, but it is still grand. Though God—the sonnet ends: "I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God."—has become inscrutable to the point where prayer and blasphemy are almost one; He is still there. To Stevens, I think, "these last strands of men" would be those which tie subject and verb into utterance. Metaphysical despair is no longer a possible stance; our language forbids. What should God answer, suppose He did answer? "Concerning your message of . . . , let me assure you that I fully appreciate your concern"? Addressed as we are by Wildroot and Vitalis ads, we cannot well sustain the faith that the hairs on our heads are counted; embedded in the solicitude and bonhomie of salesmanship, we have reason to wonder whether language can ever be more than a manipulatory device. But the archaising anathemas of Pound are little help; whipping the money changers out of the temple was meaningful as long as they still found it profitable to set up business in the *temple*. The poet's faith and resolution and act,

if it is to have meaning, is bounded by the condition of language; his business is not to scourge us in the name of dead gods and heroes, but to tell us—and this can be a quietly bitter thing—what still remains to us of true speech. Once we know this, we discover that language is not mere limit, that our condition is not unchangeable, but that both of them, truly and coldly seen, have within them creative energy. Our condition, like our language, is, or can be, *act*—minimal perhaps, but forged and integral. This possibility the poet discovers for us in the universe which is peculiarly his, but also ours, so long as we have the courage not to untwist “these last strands of man”: the universe of language.

Roy Harvey Pearce

I

As historian, I want to say something about that singular condition of modern culture, and of our poets as custodians of its sensibility, which has occasioned poems of the sort which Mr. Burckhardt last explicated. His step-by-step account of the uses of language in poetry which are antecedent to this last one is in itself an exercise in historical writing.¹ We sense, through even his highly selective analysis, what it must mean for a poet to feel free (or obliged—for from our *ex post facto* perspective they are one and the same) to make poems, and so to use language, as he must. But now I want to say something about the rationale (I do not say “rationalization”) for poems like *The Course of a Particular* as poets have understood and expressed it—in their prose meditations on poetry and in their poems. My perspective will be as broad and deep as Mr. Burckhardt’s. I grant its danger:

¹ Note well that I avoid deliberately the phrase “poetic use of language”; for it seems to me that poems are simply examples of a special, concentrated use of what some modern linguistic scholars call “non-casual utterances” and are therefore still quite within the purview of language as we use it day-to-day.

that of a certain oversimplification. But, accordingly, I claim its advantage, that of viewing as a whole a series of quite complex issues—issues whose complexity, however, derives from an indubitably simple matter of fact: that the modern poet feels himself increasingly at home in none but the one he makes for himself; and that, granting what we call the Condition of Modern Man, this is by no means an unhealthy situation. It is by no means an unhealthy situation (which is not to say that it is robustly healthy) because it marks the necessary conditions for the poet's survival in our world. And as he survives, so do we who read him: living to fight another day.

It is a commonplace among critics, however they feel about the achievements of poetry in our time, to observe that the rationale for disengagement from the workaday world has come more and more to be felt as something whose do-or-die import for us cannot be fully realized except in poems. So that modern criticism as practiced by poets (and, I must admit, as imitated by some historians) is less theoretical and/or judicial than expressive; and it takes its cues in both substance and form from that poetry whose rationale it would express. Much of the best modern criticism does not describe the role of poetry in our world. Rather it acts out that role, but as a shadow of an actor.

The critic thus, and perhaps the historian too, can avail himself of neither an ordinary nor an ideal language. He is nothing if not "alienated" from those whose business it is to construct the rules whereby we can prove to ourselves that, when we need to, we can say exactly what we mean and know exactly what we know—the philosophers. Let us say that the critic's is an ordinarily ideal language, which is the shadow (or the other side of the coin, if I sound inexactly Platonic) of the poet's language, which is an ideally ordinary language.

II

I begin by quoting three typical statements about poetry by modern poets.

From T. S. Eliot's *The Social Function of Poetry*:

We may say that the duty of the poet, as poet, is only indirectly to his people: his direct duty is to his *language*, first to preserve, and second to extend and improve. In expressing what other people feel he is also changing the feeling by making it more conscious; he is making people more aware of what they feel already, and therefore teaching them something about themselves. But he is not merely a more conscious person than the others; he is also individually different from other people, and from other poets too, and can make his readers share consciously in new feelings which they had not experienced before. That is the difference between the writer who is merely eccentric or mad and the genuine poet. The former may have feelings which are unique but which cannot be shared, and are therefore useless; the latter discovers new variations of sensibility which can be appropriated by others. And in expressing them he is developing and enriching the language which he speaks.

From Wallace Steven's *The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words*:

The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth that we shall ever experience, having no illusions, makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them. Those of us who may have been thinking of the path of poetry, those who understand that words are thoughts and not only our own thoughts but the thoughts of men and women ignorant of what it is that they are thinking, must be conscious of this: that, above everything else, poetry is words . . .

My last statement is by Paul Valéry; it comes from a letter he addressed to a philologist who had dared to take him to

task for his, as it seemed to a scholar, willful manipulation of language:

All literature which has passed a certain age reveals a tendency to create a poetic language apart from ordinary speech, with a vocabulary, syntax, license, and prohibitions that differ more or less from those in ordinary use. An account of those discrepancies would be very instructive. This differentiation is inevitable, since the functions of words and of means of expressions are not the same. One could imagine that the language of poetry might develop to a point of constituting a system of notation as different from practical speech as is the artificial language of algebra or chemistry. The slightest poem contains all the germs and indications of this potential development. I do not say whether it is desirable or not. Such a judgment would have no meaning.

If not data, then algebra or chemistry. As some recent theorists of poetry have pointed out, the outer limits of the poetic use of language are set by nonsense and mathematics. They can point this out not because they are gifted with some sort of divinatory second sight but because the condition of modern poetry is such as, upon close examination, to manifest it as a matter of cultural-historical fact. The modern poet, indeed, often proclaims his awareness that he might be pushed to one extreme or the other. Yet I must say that I think that Valéry as poet did not and could not go this far. Poets who have gone this far have in effect written only for themselves—themselves not as poets traditionally are, self-willed culture heroes of the sensibility, archetypal for all of us, but as men whom the danger of linguistic *anomie* drives to a kind of ritual suicide: each of them choosing to be a Bartleby, shall we say, not an Ishmael. Valéry's daring words (for surely they *are* daring), in any case, are worth attending to carefully. His conception of the extreme limits of the poetic use of language, informed as it is by his drive toward purity and finesse, may well let us sense even more deeply and compre-

hend more fully the sentiments expressed in the passages I have quoted from Eliot and Stevens.

Now, it is a mere truism to say that poets have always been concerned with words, with language. But this concern has been—or was, say, before the latter part of the 18th century—a concern subsidiary to a larger concern: at one extreme, to celebrate in all its rich humanity, and at the other, to denigrate, in all its vacuous inhumanity, the ways of men and their gods. Eliot and Stevens would do this too; their poetry is testimony to how much they want to do this. But first they must celebrate or denigrate, and so enlarge the potential for, *men* and the ways of men with words, and likewise *words* and the ways of words with men. (To denigrate is to celebrate inversely, out of a sense of what could or should have been.) Where once the poet could say: Proper words in proper places, now he must say: What words in what places? Or: We have words, but no places to put them in. The traditional function of poetry has been, through its linguistic transformations, to enhance, deepen, and enlarge man's vision of his world and himself in it. Now that function is to make such a vision possible. The vision is not to be attained until after, through his creation of a poetic experience, the poet can not only make us grant the possibility of the vision but also invent for us ways of realizing it. The great make-believe of most modern poetry is that the reader is composing the poem along with the poet. But then: It turns out not to be entirely make-believe. For the reader turns out to have been learning that it is possible, in spite of all of the forces which tend to disintegrate and to reduce the languages which might hold modern communities together, not only to find words but the proper places for them. Thus it would seem that the characteristic modern poem has as its intention not only registering its substantial concerns but attaining the state, through its working, of an *ars poetica*.

Let me call to mind the fact that Eliot's *Four Quartets* is

above all a poem about the relation of words to the Word. In "Burnt Norton," for example, we are told that:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place
Will not stay still.

Then, almost immediately, we are reminded that there is nonetheless "The Word in the desert. . ." And Stevens' late, long *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven* returns and again returns to this theme:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,
Part of the res itself and not about it,
The poet speaks the poem as it is,

Not as it was . . .

So that this section of the poem inevitably concludes with ". . . said words of the world are the life of the world." I cite Eliot and Stevens here, as before, because they give radically opposed answers to the series of grand questions which their poems serve to initiate: What makes the poetic use of language authoritative over our sensibilities? What is the nature of the authority? How do we know that the right word has been put in the right place? How do we know that the poet's vision is not a delusion or a nightmare? Whence the poet's special authority? Eliot's answer, as the history of his poetry shows, is: The final authority is God's Word. And Stevens' answer, as the history of his poetry shows, is: The final authority is Man, when and if he has the courage to realize himself as Man.

I shall not attempt to adjudicate, even if I could. It is necessary for my purposes here only to point out that the issue inevitably exists. Both poets (and here, above all, they are typical) are committed to this curious paradox: that

through language, the use of proper words in proper places, we may attain knowledge of that which, as it is beyond language, gives the poet his authority to claim that his visions, and likewise ours as he makes them possible, are *not* dreams or delusions. In language, in our power to communicate, to symbolize, to represent, and the like, lies at the very least the immediate ground of our humanity. (The problem of the *ultimate* ground is something else again.) And so the poet must exercise his proper role: as, in effect, custodian of our humanity. He assumes—I think justly—that we, his readers, are, like him, unavoidably participating members of our mass culture; that we are profoundly affected by its drive toward the least and most efficient common denominator; that we know that the poetic use of language, because it is the individual *poet's* use of language, is diametrically opposed to the media man's; that recognizing this as a fact, we acknowledge that our use of language, however much it is inevitably conditioned by the media man's, may also be conditioned by the poet's; that insofar as we allow the pressures and demands of our lives in the mass society to urge us to opt for the media man's use as opposed to the poet's, we have willy-nilly begun to cast off the burden of our humanity and so begun to lose our ability properly to use language. The poet, simply enough, would make it possible for us once more to take up the burden. That is, if we want to. His faith surely is that we want to. Otherwise: Why write poems? But then: He too is one of us, and shares our burdens and responsibilities.

Two more examples of the modern poet's compulsion to write about the words he uses in writing: Recall one of the most celebrated passages in Pound's *Cantos*, that from Canto 81, which centers on the lines "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world./ Pull down vanity. . ." What leads Pound to this humble pronouncement is his pride in his own achievement in the use of language, which he promptly announces:

To have gathered from the air a live tradition
 or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame
 This is not vanity.

"To have gathered from the air" words, images, ideograms. The point is that the words were somehow already there, as a "live tradition." For Pound, man has increasingly come to use them as though they were not live—this in his drive to deal usuriously, abstractly, with all that his tradition has given him. (Thus Pound's overriding interest in "Paideuma"—Leo Frobenius' word for the live cultural tradition which exists independent of those whose cultural tradition it is and which can be, as it were, plucked out of the air by those who will try hard enough.) The poet's office, in this understanding of it, has been literally once more to invent a live tradition—which, being *our* tradition (however much we may have fore-sworn it)—may be a means once more to invent (again literally: to discover) ourselves. Thus Pound's motto: Make it new.

And then, a stanza from the last section of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*:

From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
 Tall Vision-of-the Voyage, tensely spare—
 Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
 Of deepest day—O Choir, translating time
 Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
 And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
 In myriad syllables,—Psalm of Cathay!
 O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm. . . .

Again, a search for a word, an image. Here, however, since it is *one* word, *one* image, it is at once before and beyond tradition. Crane perhaps wanted it to be first God's word and then his own. But as he meditates his quest for it, it is so deeply his that it can never be God's—or, at least, this is my sense of *The Bridge* as a whole. Again, this issue might

well be debatable. That Crane wants an authoritative language, someone's language, is a fact beyond debate.

III

Let me now try to generally define—at least, so far as his performance bodies it forth—the modern poet's understanding of his role and of his dedication to search for that "pervasive Paradigm." But let me, extrapolating Mr. Burckhardt's explications and my own summary notations, try to define that role in terms of how poems work and what they may do for us: not in terms of the particular visions which they may give us. For I do not want to try, even by implication, to adjudicate the sort of oppositions I have tried to represent here: Eliot against Stevens; and also Pound against Crane. I want only to say something about the language of poetry and the language of the men whose poetry it should be, and is, when they have the courage to make it theirs.

Poetry orders language in such a way that it may urge us toward a realization of the extraordinary givenness of our lives, their infinite plenitude and contingency, their sheer human possibility. The realization at best is so integral and integrated as to be, for its duration, self-sufficient, so that we somehow assent to it. Yet, after the realization (the immediate experience of the poem) is over, its effect endures, perdures; and we discover that it has become inextricably a part of the sum-total of our experience, so that it conditions our sense of all that we experience in the future. Without poetry, we are not human. Because without poetry, we cannot realize those powers for speech, for communication, for the use of language, which are ineluctably part of the burdens and rewards of being human. This has always been true, I daresay. Now it seems truer than ever, because we would, precisely as we participate in the general life of our culture, deny that it is true. And so we must suffer toward the truth. And our poets must write poems which not only intend to make our humanity

possible, but which must further make poems possible. Thus the argument of Marianne Moore's celebrated poem on poetry: From "Poetry/ I too dislike it. . ." through the working of the poem to a realization, fully earned, that—so far as the authentic use of language is concerned—there is in poetry, at least, still "a place for the genuine." The genuineness, however is a genuineness in the poetic use of language, not in the world out of which the poem comes, or even in the world which it creates. If Herrick's daffodil—that is, his sense of it and its kind as completely manifesting what Crane was driven to call a "pervasive paradigm"—is to survive, it must be as "res," or "Word in the desert," or "tradition," or simply "multitudinous Verb." Yeats, it occurs to me, might well look to the poets from whom I have quoted as one who yet harkened back to the age of the giants before the flood. For they have been driven to say that there perhaps is no dancer: only the dance.

Or, at least, they confront the fact that this *may* be so—not words, not subjects, not themes: just poems putting language to the extreme test. In a recent essay, I. A. Richards says of poetry that it might well be defined as "Words so used that their meanings are free to dispose themselves: to make up together whatever they can." And he adds a little later in the same essay that he is speaking of "words which are free to mean as they please (which need not be 'as you or as I please')." I cite Richards here because I think that he well describes that particular quality which we sense in poems—that quality which is, as it is realized, indeed one of the necessary characteristics of a poem of our time and our place. It is, as we sense it, a quality deriving from the compromise effected between language-as-creator and poet-as-creator: so that "words are free to mean as they please" because a *poet* has freed them, because he has somehow released them from their day-to-day bondage both to our pragmatic and commonsensical and to our abstractive, theoretical use of them.

Indeed, the poet has freed words so that not only they may use us, instead of vice versa, but that we *want* them to use us. Thus we get, say, metaphor and all the other linguistic modes which, although they may occur casually and at random in our other uses of language, are systematically occasioned in its poetic use. (The phrase "poetic use" is, of course, paradoxical to the extent that it means "use so that we can be used": with our willful, planned, and decorous submission—but only for the time being.) The price we pay for the poetic use of language, and all the linguistic modes that it occasions, is that of assenting, however temporarily, to a fiction. (Wallace Stevens, in his radical humanism, dared to call it by an oxymoronic name, a "Supreme Fiction.") The transaction by which we get and give is called a poem. It is interesting, since I am citing Richards here, to note that he too, at last, has decided that the poem is perhaps the best vehicle for its own rationale. Recently he published a volume of poems, in one of which he writes:

The wise poem knows its father
And treats him not amiss;
But Language is its mother. . . .
("Lighting Fires in Snow")

I do not think it unfair to comment that the study of our poems is thus, among other things, the study of our oedipal difficulties with language. By working through those difficulties, and only by doing so, we become, linguistically, adults.

I recall too some words of Emerson, whose poems are harbingers of the sort of which I have been speaking. They too, like Richards', are words about growing up, among other ways, linguistically. They come toward the middle of *Experience*: "It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments."

This is a kind of oedipal talk, surely. (Or if "oedipal" is too disturbing a term, call it talk about our difficulty in determining the degree of authority we have when we make statements—poetic or otherwise—out of words; when we face the fact, as at some level of consciousness we must, that we are "Men Made out of Words"—which is a title of one of Stevens' poems—and that we can never be sure at what point the words are no longer our culture's and have become ours.)

The words a poet uses are not his own until he has put them into that integral structure which is a poem. But then, as many poets have testified, the words themselves, as they become increasingly implicated in a poetic structure, often dictate where they should go and what other words are needed to go with them so as to complete the structure and bring it to life. Not only semantic problems are involved herein, but also those of metrics, rhyme, convention, decorum, and the like. So that the poet may well say: This is my poem; and in the same breath admit that he is the poem's. The poem bears his name; yet it also, and at the same time, is anonymous. Clearly, he is the poem's father; he has learned somehow, somewhere, what is required of him in his role as father. But what is it to be a father in this sense? To have wedded oneself to language; perhaps to have mastered that to which one has been wedded; perhaps to have been mastered; likely both.

IV

The complexity of the relationship, I suggest, makes for those radical differences in perspective which are evident in the best *criticism* of poetry in our time. It all depends upon which—poet or language—the critic takes as master and the degree and severity of mastery he assumes. (The critic may even, if he feels himself sufficiently uninvolved from "making" the poem and involved therefore only in appreciating it, conceive of the poet as one who, paradoxically, in letting

himself be mastered, himself achieves a certain degree of mastery.) But then, this is only an aspect, perhaps the most extreme, of the relationship of all of us to the culture in whose language we try to express and so locate and define ourselves. Push the conception far enough, and you discover that the poet's oedipal difficulties with his language exemplify, in the profoundest way, ours with our culture. Are we passive before its creative force? Can we master and transform it? How can we be free? But these are too large, too theoretical questions for the poet—who is, at least as poet, a more eminently practical man. He would, one guesses, allow himself to say only: Did I really make this poem? Or did this poem somehow really make me—or, at least, make me able to make myself? Saying this, he confronts those dark ambiguities which characterize his use of that most speculative of linguistic instruments, poetry. It does not seem unfair to me to claim that those ambiguities are, in the largest sense, oedipal; and then to claim that they are ambiguities which we all must confront every time we try to speak honestly and frankly, out of all our loneliness and fear and love, out of all our need to speak and so find a place for ourselves in our world—to speak in a language we never made. The modern poet tells us, if nothing else, that it is possible to speak thus—to use language thus.

For language is surely our prime instrument for being, for growing up into, what we would be. (Richards' last book, incidentally, is called *Speculative Instruments*; and the essay from which I have quoted comes in that book and is called "Poetry as an Instrument of Research."). Now, poetry is language at its most purely instrumental: instrumental in reference primarily to itself and the possibilities which, in being so, it may open up for us. In poetry, language is (or should be) used with such precision that by being precise it increases its own precision. In its working, it invents new modes of linguistic precision: which is, after all, what meta-

phor, metrics, tone, and all such really are—so many precision-grinding instruments of language. And now, in this our age, we more than ever suspect this chief among our instruments. And suspecting it, we turn to our poets, who, after all, are only ourselves *in extremis*. ("By poet," Stevens was fond of explaining, "I mean any man of imagination." That is, I should add, any man who would be a man.) They suspect it too; they make a profession of suspecting it. And on our behalf, they would use it as an instrument to allay our (and their) suspicions. For is it not true that, as we are suspicious of our instruments, language among them, we are suspicious of ourselves? And our poetry is, now more than it has ever been, and necessarily, in another phrase from Stevens, "a poetry of ourselves." I would add, as historian: ourselves as we can catch ourselves in the act of using words whereby we may define ourselves ever more precisely, so that we may be ourselves ever more fully.

Here, of course, lies the central paradox concerning the "use" of poetry of our time *in* our time. At the least, we may use it as a protective measure; at the most, as a means of initiating an offence against the least-common-denominator trivialization which, in our technological and bureaucratic expertise, has come everywhere to seem to set our standards for its use. True enough, the language of man's day-to-day busyness has always been a moderately trivial one; but traditionally the literary man could go to poetry, when and as he needed to, because he knew that the poetic use of language, at its fullest and freest, offered him one of the supreme means of comprehending his nature and his fate as man. The movement upward from day-to-day busyness to the poetic seemed not only natural but inevitable. Literacy, when it was limited in a way which we have forever rightfully foresworn,² entailed

² And, along with literacy go all the corresponding gains from technology and industrialization. The point needs emphasis. I quote from a recent essay by C. P. Snow: "For of course, one truth is straight-forward. Industrialization is the only hope of the poor. I use the word 'hope' in a crude and prosaic

as a hope at least that the literate man might become the intelligent man, the whole man, and that he might well be lucky enough to come to the proper use of poetry—which was there waiting to be used: to guide and strengthen him in his realization of the nature and value of his world and himself in it. Poetry is still there waiting for us. But it is *our* poetry; and it inevitably reflects our coming up against the fact that literate men may, in all their literacy, be not at all concerned about the full and free and precise use of language for which poetry has traditionally set our highest model. Thus the specific nature of poetry has shifted somewhat—accommodating itself to its need to justify its existence; its modes and techniques forcing us to use it in such a way as will prove that it has a use.

V

As we have been told again and again, the crisis of our time is one of communication. We have engineered ourselves into a new situation where the quantity of trivial messages trivially expressed has increased to such an extent that we are caught up in a qualitative transformation (or revolution) in communication—and with it, in the threat of the qualitative transformation in the use of language. In this qualitative transformation, the use of language becomes increasingly depersonalized, as the complex process of moving the printed page from writer to reader is increasingly dominated by the need for efficiency and mass production. The reader is considered not as a discrete member of a “public” but someone whose identity has been lost in a “mass.” Mass production, thus, entails a mass audience; satisfying a mass audience en-

sense. I have not much use for the moral sensibility of anyone who is too refined to use it so. It is all very well for us, sitting pretty, to think that material standards of living don't matter all that much. . . .” (“The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution,” *Encounter*, No. 69 [June, 1959], p. 23) In Utopian terms; the poor man's hope is first industrialization, then literacy, then poetry. And who among us, poets included, is not poor—knowing that he well may starve despite the world's plenty?

tails pleasing all, offending none; the mass must be confirmed in its massiveness. Hence decision as to what may be communicated and how must come from a group of experts—each, however, responsible for the efficient working of but one part of the complex process of mass communications. And, of course, it is already developing that computers (which are like enormous committees, but guaranteed to be of a single mind) might just as well make the decisions. The ultimate depersonalization would (or will?) be the composition of poems by machines: irony of ironies—a return through technology to that sort of communal composition whereby it used to be thought folk poems got made; through technology to togetherness. The reading public thus would find its surcease from day-to-day pressures in messages homogenized into folksiness. The meaning of the messages would be entirely unambiguous. Or rather, the messages wouldn't "mean" at all. They would, ideally, be neither discursive nor "presentative"—not at all amenable to pondering and interpretation, much less "creative intuition." They would rather be stimuli calling for certain assured, guaranteed responses—a sense of the meeting so predetermined that we could cease holding meetings.

For the modern poet the threat of mass communications (as we may envisage their development by, say, 1984) consists in this threat of the irrelevance of the meaningful, as Mr. Burckhardt has put it. The language which is his poem's mother seems more like a prodigious female-type machine rather than a Jocasta; such language no longer links him willy-nilly with his culture but cuts him off from it. Yet the poet, above all, is one who means to "mean." We have had this preached at us regularly: He "means" to that extreme wherein "being" and "meaning" are for him identical; or almost so; or as closely so as he can make them. He means to tell his readers what it is to define themselves as persons who can both know meaning and make it. For him a person, the

person to whom he directs his poems, is defined precisely as this: someone who can both know meaning and make it. And now the usefulness of this definition—which surely is a crucial term in the largest definition of civilization that we could desire—is being challenged. Hence, in the nature of his vocation, the poet must at once defend its usefulness and confirm its accuracy. He still has for subject-matter and theme the richness in persons, places, and things of his world at large. Until they are wiped off the face of the earth, they will be there—always teasing him into rendering his sense of them into language. But now he must not only discover and realize the meaningfulness of his subject-matter; he must also show that it *can* be meaningful—specifically, that the poem is the occasion, perhaps the highest, for meaningfulness. Our complaint about him is that, fulfilling the second of his obligations, he has somewhat neglected the first. But the first, we must realize, is impossible without the second. Surely it would be of little avail to show that anything is meaningful unless one took seriously (which means: knew how to take seriously) the fact of meaningfulness itself. The poet lives as one of us, under conditions which make us everywhere cry out: What is the meaning of meaning? And he has made his answer: Knowing meaning and making it are at once a function and a measure of being a person. It has followed that his is in our time one of the chief bastions against the debilitating forces of mass communications. (His enemies call his bastion a place where “circularity” defines “solipsism”: the philosophically inclined media man’s terms for “body” and “soul”.) Before we chide him for what he has not done, we had better understand him for what he has tried to do, and with surprising success: to teach us to hold on for dear life to our faith that there is indeed “a poetry of ourselves.”

RECENT CRITICISM, "THEMATICS," AND THE EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA¹

Murray Krieger

I

MANY OF THE CRITICS I have elsewhere called the new apologists for poetry, while interesting themselves with endless ingenuity in the complex operations of poetic language, have for the most part—or for the most important part—not done so out of a sterile Alexandrian dilettantism that runs after the verbally precious as a matter of self-congratulation: in order to reveal their powers of infinite division and multiplication. They clearly are not, as many would have them be, just so many deluded refugees from *The Dunciad*. Far from a barren formalism that in its ascetic purity scorns any interest in the teeming fullness of experience, these critics interest themselves in the poetic behavior of words out of a conviction that this behavior, with all its ambiguities, is reflective of the ambiguities of moral existence below the level of those finally inadequate abstractions which, through systematic discourse, we normally impose upon that existence. They want to restore the world in which the sensitive and fully human being has always found himself, a world never totally unambiguous which cries out for the illumination that the formally controlled literary work can alone bestow. And it can bestow it only through the very manipulations of poetic discourse and its complexities to which these critics must dedicate themselves with a meticulousness their detractors see as pedantic, as a critical ingenuity paraded merely for its own sake.

¹ Originally delivered at the 1959 Vanderbilt Literary Symposium, this essay is a severely condensed version of the final chapter of *The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation*, to be published by Rinehart and Company.

However, any attempt to reduce the utterances of these critics to pure formalism—that is, to an interest in the “how” rather than the “what” of poetry—must confront their continual and ubiquitous insistence on the indissolubility of form and content in the total poetic context, in our perception of it, and in that rationalization of our perception which we term criticism. The terms *form* and *content*, then, in their view mere hangovers from a tradition of critical discourse that is invariably dualistic, are expressive of an obsolete critical strategy that these critics would discard. In answering a charge of formalism they would have to counter-charge that their attackers are themselves so trapped by the form-content dichotomy that once they perceive that a critic does not talk about a separable subject-matter—as so-called new critics certainly do not—there is no alternative but to label such a critic a pure formalist.

In the organicism of their theoretical framework, these critics replace talk of form and content with talk of context, complexity, tension, texture. Eliot's original interest in the unity of sensibility and Richards' in a “poetry of inclusion” arising from the multivalence of a playful irony never at rest—both are consistent with, as they are derivative from, the all-embracing Coleridgean imagination that for the last century and a half has dominated organic theory as its prime symbol. And from these notions of Eliot and Richards has come most of what passes for the new criticism. And with it comes the notion of poetry as a special form of discourse—or, in its most extreme form, each poem as a unique system of discourse, obedient only to the laws immanently within itself, laws that evolve in accordance with the *telos* of the poem.²

² I mean to use terms like “poem” or “poetry” or “poetic context” in their broadest sense, Aristotle's sense, as including everything we normally think of as imaginative literature, prose fiction and prose drama as well as verse. Much of what I say in a later discussion rests on the assumption that prose fiction is capable of developing contextual characteristics comparable to those of verse.

If the context of the poem is to work upon us in the many simultaneous and even contradictory ways that Richards, advocating his poetry of inclusion, would insist upon, then clearly it must be inviolable. It must keep us inside, bouncing from opposition to opposition as we realize the fullness and the complexity of internal relations of the unique contextual system.

In his most distinctive work, Cleanth Brooks carries these notions out of Richards' psychologistic universe into our world of experience, so that he asks us to see in the inclusiveness of the self-complicating poetic context a reflection of the fullness of experience-as-lived. It is this fullness that Brooks would have poetry, as a unique mode of discourse and a unique mode of revelation, substitute for the abstractness, thinness, and incompleteness of experience as systematized in referential and propositional discourse, whether scientific or philosophic, and in poetic discourse wrongly pursued. John Crowe Ransom implies much the same thing in his famous metaphor about "the world's body," that which in its textural richness informs poetry even as in the interest of its skeleton it is ignored by other forms of discourse. When Allen Tate derives his term "tension" from the logical terms "extension" and "intension," he does so also to indicate the plenitude that transforms poetry into a special mode of discourse. These critics, then, see poetry as an alternative to the referential characteristic of other discourse in that poetry must multiply meanings within a closed context rather than, like other discourse, allow these meanings to escape one by one and point beyond. They see poetry also as an alternative to the propositional characteristic of other discourse in that poetry is governed not by logical rules of systematic consistency but by contextual operations that defy the systematic.

As one would imagine, these critics have little use for poetry of direct statement, for the poetic claim that does not carry its own contradiction within itself. We find Ransom

speaking against "Platonic" poetry, that dualistic affair, perhaps sanctioned by an earlier criticism, in which meaning and poem are separate entities. At much the same time Tate was using the words of Yeats to decry that poetry which reveals "the will trying to do the work of the imagination." And when Brooks speaks about the "heresy of paraphrase," he joins the others in their essential claim: that the poem can mean only in the words that constitute it, that all else is a violation not merely of the poem's aesthetic wholeness but of its full cognitive powers. Even the somewhat unlikely ally, Yvor Winters, affirms that no paraphrase can yield a poem's meaning as he echoes Mallarmé in defining the proper poem as "a new word"—a word, presumably, whose definition can be provided only by its own closed system. Their distinction between a dualistic and a monistic poetry—that is, between a poetry whose meaning is transcendent and one whose meaning is immanent—is in effect a distinction between a poetry that could be exhaustively treated within the familiar confines of the form-content or message-embellishment dichotomy and a poetry that could be treated only in post-Ricardian terms. And yet, of course, it is a distinction that echoes the Coleridgean distinction between fancy and imagination and the Crocean distinction between allegory and symbol.

But these critics, out of a classical pursuit of order, often retreat from so extreme an organic monism. Eliot and Richards have much to say on the nature of belief in poetry that would seem to reconstitute the breach between meaning and poetic form. Ransom, in his insistence on logical structure; Tate, in his insistence on the denotative precision he terms "extension"; and Winters, in his insistence on rational motive—all manage to retract much of what makes their criticism distinctive. Apparently afraid of the reckless romanticism and misty idealism at the heart of a theoretical orientation mainly derived from romantic and idealistic sources, these critics as would-be neo-classicists wanted their new critical strategy

without paying the theoretical price and at times seemed to be playing both sides of the street.

Only Brooks seemed for a long time to be holding out against any slightest surrender of the inviolable context to the demands of the referential or the propositional. He appeared rightly to understand that, like uniqueness, organicism is an all-or-nothing affair and that to qualify it was, theoretically, to yield completely. And so he held out even under attack by new-critical colleagues like Ransom who found him unmitigatedly romantic. But his recent association with William K. Wimsatt in their *Literary Criticism: a Short History* seems finally to have brought Brooks around as well. He now speaks of the need for "fixities and definites," of "the logical, the definite, and the unequivocal," as the antidote for "incoherence" and "symbolic fluidity."

These critics, then, have, each in his own way, made their imprint on the history of criticism by asserting the uniqueness and self-containedness of poetic systems of discourse (in the most extreme form a different one for each poem). The internal complications of a poem, while sealing it off and keeping us within it, also serve to reflect as no other discourse can the internal complications of the existential universe, those more things on heaven and earth than are dreamt of in anyone's philosophy. Then, having made these daring claims and having in their practical criticism made so much of them, these critics recognized the romantic implications of them: a self-complicating context with no outside check on the multiplication of complexity heading away from art toward the chaos of romantic obscurantism; an utterly closed contextual system that gives the reader no opening that will allow him to enter it. Further, in the attempt to reproduce those contradictions in experience that defy system, the poetry licensed by organicism, with no limits set upon the desirable extent of inclusiveness, seemed moving toward the self-destructive goal where the disciplined refinement of art

is lost to the incomprehensible coarseness of pure experience. Only life itself can afford such infinite variety; and life is hardly poetry, which is probably a blessing for both. So Yvor Winters coined his "fallacy of imitative form" to describe the poet's surrender of formal control to the formless stuff of experience which he wants to capture but comes closer to reproducing. And the group generally reinstates—at least partially—the obligations of poetry to the restrictions of normal discourse—that is, the restrictions of reference and of propositional procedure.

II

The difficulty of their position arises not so much from their own indifference to theoretical consistency as it does from the very real nature of the dilemma they face. Some considerations demand that the poem be seen as a closed system, some considerations demand with equal persuasiveness that it be seen as opening outward to the world and to externally imposed laws of rational order. Yet it cannot be partly closed, partly open. Organicism and inviolability of context being matters of kind and not of degree, poetry must be seen as a form of discourse in some sense nonreferential even as it must be in some sense referential to be a form of discourse at all. It must be seen as in some sense a closed world of meaning even as this many-faceted world is created largely to open onto and illuminate the facets we would miss in the outside world of every day.

We can sympathize with Brooks in his desire to broaden and ease his position by modifying its pure organicism and its unlimitedly romantic consequences. But alas, this is not the way to evade the dilemma; since, much as we would like to, we cannot take organicism by degrees, this is the way only to an untenable, if seemingly unavoidable, eclecticism. Brooks merely joins his fellows who yielded earlier. With them he must confront the doubt that undermines his claims; however impossible an unqualified organicism may appear to

be, a partial organicism is impossible, is in effect no organicism, and the alternative to organicism is destructive of all that recent theory has taught us about poetry.

Future theorists who will want to preserve the gains and the distinctive direction of these critics and who will not want to see these washed away into the common stream of Platonic theory, will have to find a way to keep poetry's contextual system closed; to have the common materials which enter poetry—conventions of word meaning, of propositional relations, and of literary form—so transmuted in the creative act with its organic demands as to come out utterly unique. The reader will somehow be seen to repeat the procedure: to find his way into the poem by its seeming use of ordinary reference, ordinary propositions, and conventional literary forms, only to find himself suddenly and wonderfully trapped by the transmutations that make these elements most extraordinary. And his explorations through this uniquely paradoxical world—at once so full existentially and so rarified aesthetically—must be seen to show him what is unique about what before, in his blindness, passed as the ordinary world outside. These future theorists will have to find a way also to keep poetic form as a disciplining force while at the same time insisting that it is an inward form and that its disciplinary quality does not lead poetry to abstract from life as other discourse does. Instead of being ruled by general word-meanings and by a ruthless, universally applied logic, each word is to be seen as gently guided by contextual meanings and by a unique form which it helps to create. On the other hand, in seeing poetry as life that is *formed* (rather than as life that is logically systematized), they must still recognize that poetry, for all its inclusiveness, dare not be as inclusive as life without abdicating its form to surrender to experience in its unrelieved wholeness. Somehow the line which separates artful complexity from natural chaos must be finely drawn.

In the conclusion to their recent history of criticism, Wimsatt and Brooks try their hand at resolving our dilemma by suggesting how we may preserve the valuable conclusions recent critics have reached about the several opposed voices with which the poem can speak without encouraging aesthetic chaos and outlawing all moral commitment. While their suggestion is finally no more than a metaphorical one and is, I suppose, to that extent unsatisfactory, the metaphor is a most provocative one—one that will put us a long way toward drawing thematic implications from the aesthetic we have been examining. They are again contrasting the Platonic conception of poetry that sees a single transcendent meaning and the organic conception that sees an organized and complex opposition of immanent meanings. They again find both inadequate, the Platonic because it destroys the role of poetry by thinning it and thus trimming it down to other discourse, and the organic because it contains no final return to order, no final affirmation of a cosmic controlling principle. Indeed, by definition the ironic view can nothing affirm. Translating these alternatives into theological terminology, the authors believe:

... that the kind of literary theory which seems . . . to emerge the most plausibly from the long history of the debates is far more difficult to orient within any of the Platonic or Gnostic ideal world views, or within the Manichaeic full dualism and strife of principles, than precisely within the vision of suffering, the optimism, the mystery which are embraced in the religious dogma of the Incarnation.

This soaring notion carries us in the direction of aesthetic order beyond the dramatic theory of endless struggle, the dualistic or pluralistic—if not chaotic—theory of unresolvable tension most characteristically implied by many of the pronouncements of our critics. It may remind us of Ransom's earlier postulating of "miraculism"—the physical embodiment of the airily spiritual—as the alternative to the un-

worldly thinness of what he calls "Platonic Poetry" on the one hand and the unelevated density of what he calls "Physical Poetry" on the other. In Wimsatt and Brooks, too, the leap to the Incarnation represents their rejection of an all-exclusive intellectualism and an all-inclusive density as they embrace the final affirmation that can come as a miraculous, all-reconciling grace only after an *almost* total abandonment to conflict.

It is clear that in this kind of formulation the final reassertion of aesthetic order becomes a reflection of the reassertion of moral order. After all, we have seen not only that the tensional version of contextualism, in the extreme form that is its only consistent form, seems to forego any aesthetic order externally imposed upon its self-complicating dynamics; but also that this theory, in its ironic posing of counter-claim along with every claim, seems to forbid any final thematic resolution, any final moral commitment, in the name of experiential complexity, which readily supplies the skepticism that comes of a total awareness. Yvor Winters may have been more correct than many of his detractors, in their anti-didacticism, have credited him with being in his insistence that rational poetic form exerted upon recalcitrant materials is a reflection of the poet's moral control of his disturbing experience: to forego one is to forego the other. Consequently we begin to see how completely this aesthetic would seem to depend on a metaphysic or even a theodicy. In a recent essay that pursues the implications of the concluding chapter of the history of criticism—an essay entitled "Poetic Tension: a Summary"³—Wimsatt turns more explicitly in the thematic direction himself. Again he at once attacks the Manichean implications of unresolved thematic tensions and defends the dramatic need to give full due to the mixed and imperfect nature of the human condition. He ends by exhorting the

³ "Poetic Tension: a Summary," *The New Scholasticism*, XXXII (1958), pp. 73-88.

Christian writer and the Christian critic to recognize the need for a clear moral commitment in literature, but only a commitment that has been earned through an *almost* total dramatic submission to the forces of opposition.

But can *anything* be withheld if the test is to be complete, if the ironic, self-contradictory nature of moral experience is to be allowed full sway? Is not even the slight rational, philosophic control of the stuff of drama infringement enough to ensure the stacking of the cards, the intrusion of an abstract order that pre-exists the poem upon thematic oppositions, even as we earlier saw the slight concessions by our critics to referential and propositional discourse to be enough to open the organic context irrevocably? For Wimsatt, and probably Brooks, the need in poetics to find an order that somehow does full justice to the internal complications of the context not only is analogous, but is intimately related, to the need in the realm of theme to find a moral order that somehow does full justice to the fearful paradoxes that inhere in experience. But can the pleasantly eclectic compromise satisfy in the one realm any more than it can in the other?

By shifting, then, from a merely metaphorical to a literal use of the drama which witnesses the Gnostic-Manichaeian opposition and witnesses it yielding, through miracle, to the Incarnation, we can discover the unbroken realm that joins the aesthetic to the thematic—the moral-religious—dimension of poetry; and we can manage the tactical movement from one to the other. In making this movement we must observe an important peculiarity in the relation of the aesthetic to the thematic, a peculiarity that will force us to be careful with our terminology: What I earlier spoke of as the dualistic aesthetic—that Platonism, assailed by our critics, which splits poetry into form and content and sees it as the transparent vehicle of a prior, separable, indeed transcendent meaning—can obviously provide only for thematic singularity, for but one propositional system. On the other hand, the

monistic aesthetic—the organicism which sees the poetic context as bearing immanently within itself a complex of opposed meanings—just as obviously provides for an equivocal thematic duality that Wimsatt calls Manichaeian. A very different sort of duality indeed, this latter: one which can be produced only by a sealed and sovereign poetic context dedicated to its own complexity.

III

It is this sort of unresolvable opposition that leads to what I term the literary discipline of “thematics.” I should like to pause here to say precisely what I mean by this coinage in hopes that this definition will help us along the road our explorations ought to follow. From all I have said, it should be at once clear that I cannot mean to use *thematics* in a way related to the usual and unsophisticated sense of the term *theme*. Obviously I cannot mean by it the so-called “philosophy” of a work, that series of propositions which we supposedly can derive—or, better yet, extrapolate—from the aesthetic totality that is presented to us. Since I am moving to the problems of meaning, of the “world” that is offered us, from a monistic, organic conception of that aesthetic totality, I can hardly think in terms of a separable philosophic theme that an author embodies in order to justify it literarily, to put it to the test of drama and its dialectic. (I might add that it was just this “putting to the test,” but little that was more organic than this, that we saw Wimsatt recommending in his compromise between the “tensional” and Christian approaches.) Rather I must insist, on behalf of recent criticism in its consistently organic moments, that every self is to be confronted with the anti-self, every claim with its antithesis, with no possibility of an all-reconciling synthesis—unless it is one that is accompanied by a newly disruptive anti-synthesis. At least I must insist on all this in the good work, by which I must mean the work that demands the more delicate

probings of the literary discipline of *thematics* since in its complexity it remains disdainfully inaccessible to the vain attempts to empty it by crudely tearing at it here and there to come up with some philosophical generalizations. And again, I suppose, I am allowing a single conception of the phenomenology of our moral life to support a single aesthetic methodology in that I acknowledge that, in support of this view of *thematics*, I must deny that the existential world—the world of felt human experience—can be anything less than a bewildering complex of seeming contradictions. Given this sort of world, how can any more systematic view of it—the kind of view we get in that dualistically conceived “Platonic” literature whose meaning really is exhausted by the extrapolation of its philosophical theme—how can such a view avoid, in its inadequacy, doing this world a grievous injustice?

Following the more organic aspects of the new-critical poetics, then, we can define *thematics* as the study of those experiential tensions which, dramatically entangled in the literary work, become an existential reflection of that work’s aesthetic complexity. *Thematics* thus conceived is as much beyond “philosophy” and in the same way beyond “philosophy” as, in pure poetics, an organic, contextually responsible form is beyond a logically consistent system. There can be occasions on which the author means to be conceiving his work dualistically, as an embodiment and a demonstration of a “philosophy,” except that he has been more faithful—dramatically and existentially faithful—than he knows; so that a fully thematic analysis would reveal that significant opposition is engendered when this philosophy enters the total poetic context, with the consequence that an objective hierarchy of values and the poet’s full sympathies are not so easily identified or, thanks to the endless qualifications, perhaps identifiable at all. I believe these occasions are more numerous than we may at first admit and the more numerous as the literature is more valuable—valuable, of course, in terms

of this aesthetic and thus this conception of thematics. On a less theoretical occasion I could demonstrate at length, showing, for example, how a fully thematic analysis of *The Trial* confounds the systematic claims of either theological or social-political interpreters, or how a fully thematic analysis of *Man's Fate* confounds the trim lines of its apparently Marxist frame, or how a fully thematic analysis of any number of works by Conrad confounds the stalwart assertion that he affirms "universal solidarity."

It may, of course, seem at best silly and at worst heretically presumptuous for a critic to argue for an intolerable worldview just to satisfy the needs of an aesthetic and a literary method. But what is being insisted upon here as Manichaeism is not the ultimate nature of cosmic reality so much as the existential nature of that reality which makes itself dramatically available to the poet whose only commitment as poet is to experience and to the dramatic exigencies of his art.

It is really a commonplace to say that every poet must, at least provisionally, be something of a Manichaean. This is but a way of our asking him not to stack the cards, but rather to give his drama full sway, always to allow his opposition its argument *a fortiori*. But if he does no more than this—if, that is, he submits his thesis to the hellfires of antithesis with no doubt of the issue and only to allow this thesis to be earned the hard way—he is in no more danger of heresy than is any profound version of Christianity that is willing to take into account all worldly imperfection without reducing the extent or the goodness of God's sway. Once more let me repeat that this is essentially Wimsatt's position in the article to which I have already referred several times; and once more let me repeat also that this position, however mature and qualified, cannot finally make literature more than "Platonic," bearing its propositional thesis, any more than it can finally allow the dominion of God to be shared.

For the writer who deals with extreme situations, with a

character's sudden and utter confrontation by absurdity, the existential paradoxes are seen to be unresolvable as they point to the inadequacy of any rational, any systematically ethical disposition.⁴ In viewing existential reality as resisting the neatness of ethical systems, I am again reasserting in thematic terms the aesthetic claim that the poetic mode of discourse is extra-propositional. The propositional, then, becomes the discursive equivalent of the rational coherence embodied in moral philosophy; and the poetic, contextually defined, becomes the discursive equivalent of that existential realization into which the extreme situation propels its victim. Where more than in literature can one meet so convincingly with the extreme situation and its existential consequences? Is it not, perhaps, in the very formulation of extremity, with the purification of the casual that extremity brings, that literature can manage formal control over experience even while managing to account for the entire extent of it? Literature in this way too may be seen as persuading its reader toward the Manichaeon, the nakedly and unmitigatedly existential, in that the existential, as beyond (or rather prior to) the systematically ethical, sees the absurdity of unreconcilable opposition everywhere and ultimately. Indeed, with the existential so opposed to philosophy, literature becomes the only possible form of existential philosophy—or must I say existential thematics?—precisely because only within the liberal confines of literary casuistry can the existential be explored. Otherwise it is falsely reduced to just another philosophy, just as literature Platonically considered is reduced to just another mode of prose discourse.

It is, however, not really accurate to speak of the contextually poetic or of the existential as involving self-contradiction. Or rather it is not relevant. For in neither are we dealing with

⁴ This confrontation and its relation to the ethical world are discussed at length in my "Tragedy and the Tragic Vision," *The Kenyon Review*, XX (1958), pp. 281-299.

propositions. It has been suggested, for example, that new critics are inconsistent when they speak against the "heresy of paraphrase"; that they actually are not against all paraphrases as being inadequate to the poem but are only against those oversimplified ones that do not take into account the nuances and the paradoxes. In this case all one has to do is to elaborate and extend the paraphrase in order to satisfy them and exhaust the poem of its meaning. But I believe one discovers as he elaborates upon the paraphrase that, after a certain point, the work begins to slip through his over-solicitous fingers and to sound like capricious, self-contradictory foolishness. For what is likely is that just as the confining terms of any ethical system are inadequate to the raging existential world, so the world of propositions is simply inappropriate to it, although, viewed from the standpoint of propositional procedure, this existential world and the poetic discourse that reflects it may well *seem* to be filled with contradiction. This world is not, then, a propositional world with all coherence gone, with all the brakes removed—a self contradictory propositional world that, through poetic economy, manages, with discursive waywardness, to state several incompatible propositions at once. It is rather an extra-propositional world, of another order, a pre- or post-propositional world—as you will—even if it seems to be contradictory when, using the only discourse at our disposal as critics, we try to talk logically about it, so that we come out with a confusing proliferation of would-be propositions.

But the dramatic and, as wholeheartedly dramatic, the unreconcilable polarities remain. And in their failure to find a higher peace, they reflect the intransigent dual principle that is Manichaeism. Yet for the literary work there is still the need for aesthetic wholeness. Literature may deal with the experientially full in avoiding the single, thin line of system; but to the extent that it remains art it must claim to have some kind of aesthetic system all its own, a system still, though

so different from a philosophical system. Can such a system be sustained if there is no final assertion, no single set of affirmations that resolves oppositions in the direction of order? Yet only by turning aside from the demand of aesthetic organicism and from the confrontation of existential absurdity can one so assert and affirm. Can we not, then, get at all beyond tension? If not, how are we to be assured that the tension, with its unyielding dualism, will hold the work together through the delicate poise it creates among its oppositions and not split it asunder through a tug of war among them?

IV

We are in effect returned to the earlier and more purely aesthetic problem which asked how we were to assure ourselves of enough formal control to shun chaos and produce art when organic theory would allow us no form that was not contextually evolved. But now our thematic explorations should enable us to ask this question in a more useful way. If we grant the unreconcilable oppositions within the phenomenology of the moral life which prevent the literary work from achieving a finally positive thematic resolution, is there yet not some way in which at least an aesthetic resolution may be achieved? Or, to return to an earlier conviction, in part borrowed from Yvor Winters, that aesthetic and moral resolutions are two sides of a single coin—the work by its very aesthetic order attesting to an orderly universe—if we should manage even the merely aesthetic resolution, what transformations might be worked on the moral universe should the slightest touch of aesthetic harmony rub off on it, as it must?

It is like asking not only whether the humanizing enlightenment cast by Ishmael organizes *Moby Dick* as a novel but whether in so doing it also purges the novel of the demonism of Ahab. Aside from Ishmael, there would seem to be in the novel an unending tension—created by Ahab's extremity—between the ethical and the demoniacal, between what—in

the spirit of Melville—we could term the humanities and the inhumanities.⁵ Ishmael, as pseudo-author on both sides of the oppositions, claims a fully human order in which they melt. But we discover that he is indeed the pseudo-author and not a character, narrator rather than protagonist; that, having assimilated his characters, he must create an orderly object out of them and must move beyond the tensions if he is to manage to control them and to avoid their divisive, Manichean tendencies that threaten to rend the aesthetic oneness of his story. His final resolution stems from his need, as fictive author, to absorb all his characters and to transcend them all alike. But it comes at the high existential price of depriving him of an active role involving moral decision, indeed depriving him even of a unique moral identity. Instead his is a consummate identity. Yet as the only one who escaped, Ishmael is in one sense more alone than Ahab, as alone as his biblical namesake. His function is related to the technical device we call point-of-view: it leads us to an aesthetic wholeness rather than to a higher Christianity. As an observer in need of the comprehensive vision, in his final avoidance of extremity he can hardly represent an alternative to Ahab's way any more than he is a rival protagonist. For Ishmael has never been stricken himself and has only the vicarious experience of Ahab to challenge him; and that is a challenge not to him personally but to him only as consummate author through his creature Ahab, whom he must assimilate aesthetically but whom he cannot replace existentially.

So the salvation and the resurrection are uniquely his, but precisely because only he has no role to play, because, as Melville acknowledges, he is "escaped alone to tell" us. Is it not, then, that the cosmic and moral affirmation we want to at-

⁵ My view of this conflict has been profoundly conditioned by that most moving and perceptive book, M. O. Percival's *A Reading of Moby Dick* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), especially pp. 124-129. And what I have to say about Ishmael's role clearly stems from this, too, although I must take the responsibility for the heretical twist that denies to him the final, transcendent thematic resolution.

tribute to Ishmael may, finally considered, be a kind of aesthetic delusion? that, for those who have been stricken and thus thrust into the boundlessness of the existential, the Manichaeon opposition is not really dissolved by Ishmael's vision after all? that only the formal oppositions of the novel's poetic context are dissolved by it, and these aesthetically rather than thematically?

But the stricken necessarily finds an extremity that is unique, with none on the side who can compose the issue. So, viewed from beyond him, perhaps the illusion of reconciliation is more than merely persuasive, and aesthetic soundness is symbol of moral and cosmic soundness. After all, in art illusion—what aestheticians used to call *Schein*—is all. And we may have to rescue the thematic implications of Ishmael's affirmation through an all-restoring grace, even if we can never totally deny the terror and even the validity of Ahab's vision. All of this is, of course, not the same as the overt attempt at clean moral resolution that we find in *Billy Budd*, an attempt whose aesthetic honesty I would be forced to deny.

Is not this need to assert the reconciliation along with the unreconcilable precisely the thematic version of the aesthetic need to assert the restrictions of form along with the abandon of contextual tension? And does not the very notion of extremity bear the entire mystery? I have suggested that for the poet to formulate the extreme situation is indeed for him to play the casuist by purifying experience of the casual; that through the narrow intensity of *a fortiori* controls, the extreme situation can manage to account for the total breadth of experience, for all that is less committed and more compromising—and compromised. This is in effect what Henry James means in speaking of actual life that "persistently blunders and deviates, loses herself in the sand," in his complaints against the "stupid work" of "clumsy" raw experience which, unpurified, not merely militates against art but obfuscates its own meaning, leaving to art the role of mining

this meaning anew. The extreme, then, is both more pure and more inclusive—pure in the adulterations it rejects and inclusive in the range of less complete experiences it illuminates even as it passes them by. Thus at once the rarity and the density, the order and the plenitude. But finally, in retreat as it were, there must be the observer, the more compromised and less committed, the resister of extremity who from his middle existence can place extremity for us. Not fatally challenged, he has yet learned vicariously to see extremity as the necessary and most instructive vision, the illusion—*aesthesis*, *Schein*—that which creates reality for us by forcing us to see it as we never dare to outside of art because in art we think it is appearance only. For secure in what we take to be mere aesthetic illusion, we plunge into the risk of art: we allow the comforting delusions we normally take for reality to trace their path to extremity, there to be given back utter reality, that which terrifies even as it returns us, newly sound and justified, to our middle (and muddled) existences chastened by extremity and taking up the order in our lives with tender hands that now know its delusiveness and its fragile, unsubstantial prospects.

LEAR'S EQUATIONS

Richmond Y. Hathorn

I

"IN OUR OBSERVATION and systematic study of nature, we shall take as our starting-point the following basic principle: that nothing whatever is produced from nothing by agency of the divine under any circumstances." So says Lucretius in beginning his exposition of the prototype of all materialisms and scientisms, *On the Nature of the Universe*. "For," he continues, "we mortals are hedged about by feelings of dread and awe because we are spectators of multiform phenomena in earth and sky to which we are unable to assign visible and comprehensible causes and for whose explanation we have recourse to some concept of deity. But when once we have perceived the principle that nothing can be created from nothing, then the road to the goal of our inquiry lies clear and straight before us, and, discarding all notions of divine intervention, we are enabled to understand the origins of particular things and the workings of the universe."

Lucretius' is the noblest and most impressive statement of human despair in literature precisely because he does not blink the fact that, according to his lights, for one particular thing in the universe, namely Man, the road that leads to the goal of inquiry is a road that leads to death, to nothingness. If nothing can come from nothing, it follows that all things, save only the blind and unfeeling atom, the imperishable and unliving, purposeless and meaningless atom, go their way in time to certain annihilation. Nature, too, or all that we may sense of Nature, is similarly doomed. "O ruined piece of Nature!" Gloucester exclaims when he comes upon mad King Lear on the heath; "this great world/ Shall so wear out

to naught" (IV.vi.135-36)—a thought that Lucretius had in his time found most congenial.

But unlike the Roman poet, Shakespeare was no philosopher, we have been repeatedly told. True, perhaps, yet happily voices have recently been raised to assert that this by no means prevented his being a thinker, and a profound one. Instead of attempting to solve the problems of existence, he symbolized life's mysteries; instead of working analytically, he worked mythically. The mythic quality of such a play as *Lear* impresses every reader and every spectator. The ceremonious implausibility of the opening scene has been remarked upon from a time at least as far back as Coleridge. And equally formalistic and unnatural elements have aroused critics' ire or approbation: the final duel between Edmund and the Unknown Challenger, the leap of Gloucester over an imaginary Dover cliff, Lear's mad monologues, and the mock-trial of Goneril and Regan in the hovel, to name only a few. It is as if Shakespeare, by choosing to construct his plot out of such wild improbabilities, had deliberately flouted all the canons of naturalism. Could he have done so? Was naturalism abroad in Elizabethan England that it need be flouted?

Perhaps the profoundest significance of that re-birth of antiquity that we call the Renaissance was not that the European mind became re-acquainted with classical art and literature and science, not even that by recovering a knowledge of the ancient world in true perspective it re-acquired a sense of history. Rather, as we look back through subsequent intellectual development, we may see that of gravest import was the re-emergence of a system of philosophic thought—naturalism, Stoicism, atomism, scientism—which in its nobility and complexity could constitute a serious rival to Christianity. In late antiquity and in the High Middle Ages the Christian world-view had been able, by and large, to assimilate paganism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism. But the newly revived naturalism it could not assimilate. There were attempts dur-

ing the Renaissance to do so, of course. There was, for instance, the Christian Stoicism of such men as Chapman and Justus Lipsius. Even more indicative, however, of the course of thought in future centuries was the experiment of Bacon in compartmentalizing religion and science; relegating religion to a limbo of occasional faith, Bacon transferred human hopes from Supernature to Nature. With this severance of Faith from Hope, already, one or more generations before Hobbes, Descartes, Newton, and Gassendi, philosophic mechanism was set in motion and had only to follow out its predestined way.

This was the intellectual atmosphere in which *King Lear* came to birth.

II

It has often been called a pagan and secular play; its Christian elements have also often been emphasized. It would seem that to classify *Lear* either way calls for much qualification. It certainly is a Christian play, but its Christianity is mainly a matter of negative proof. It begins with the assumptions of secularism and bears these out to their conclusion. And the conclusion is despair, horror, nothingness. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods" (IV. i. 36) is the *Q.E.D.* of the naturalistic demonstration. With Gloucester tormented and dead, Cordelia hanged and dead, Lear maddened and dead, the curtain falls. "Is this the promis'd end? Or image of that horror?" (V. iii. 263-64) is the ultimate question posed to the audience. Which is to say: the Last Judgment is your judgment; you may believe that it is this way if you will; but there are not lacking intimations of a better view.

It has been noted that when Shakespeare brings the villains of the drama on the stage he presents them as naturalists; Gloucester and Lear also begin their reasoning in a naturalistic way. Lear's initial axiom is "Nothing can come from

nothing." Lear's corollary is, "All things end in nothing." From these principles the play proceeds to draw certain equations and to show that they are invalid.

Equation One is the Equation of Logic: "Words equal things."

Equation Two, the Equation of Causality, states that "Things equal things," which is to say, "Effects equal their causes."

Equation Three, the Equation of Analysis, maintains that as far as mankind is concerned "Human beings equal things," *i.e.* that "What a human being really is is the sum of the things of which he is made."

Logic, causality, and analysis are the foundation-stones of the scientific structure. (I take measurement and classification to be varieties of analysis.) Naturalism is that philosophy which excludes consideration, and sometimes denies the existence, of all reality that is not amenable to approach by the scientific method. "Where there is no mathematics, there is no science": naturalistic thought is therefore necessarily equational thought. Opposed to this is transcendental thought, which deals with mystery, which, in turn, can be adequately symbolized only in terms of myth.

To expose the insufficiency of these fundamental naturalistic equations, Shakespeare resorts to at least three myths: the Ordeal of the Riddle, the Debasement of the King, and the Duel with the Unknown Champion.

(An apology is doubtless in order here for this overschematic analysis of such a unified work of art as *King Lear*. One can only plead in defense that such is the nature of criticism; if it is not to compete in kind with the art-work to which it is applied, it must employ a radically different method of discourse. In short, it cannot escape from those very limitations of language which we shall see Shakespeare expose. Besides, the reader will note that the three equations are basically one, stemming from a circular concept of reality,

in the same way that the three myths are basically one, symbolizing the impingement of the transcendent on the actual.)

Words equal things: at first glance it may seem grossly unfair to impute such an assumption to naturalists, since they have been most careful in rejecting any hint of hypostasization, being in fact the very group which has assigned to a fictive "primitive mentality" such confusion of words with the entities to which they refer. The proposition, however, does not state that words are identical with things, but that they are equivalent, that, to put it otherwise, language, though somehow not a part of reality, can truthfully reflect it. The inadequacy of this naturalistic assumption is revealed most glaringly in the utter failure of logicians to define "truth" itself. Every such attempt has come to grief because "truth" is a mystery, being a term in language that refers exclusively neither to language nor to non-language, but to a certain ethical relationship between the two. But naturalists assume that the more narrowly one can circumscribe the area of non-verbal reference to which each single word is applied, the more closely one can approach truth. This does not work very well, or at least does not get us very far into those realms of meaning that are most meaningful. Not even in the physical realm, disconcertingly enough, is accuracy always desirable. One recalls Pierre Duhem's discussion of the difficulties attendant on ascertaining the temperature at which a block of ice will melt under a certain pressure. As the practical facts in the situation can be translated into any of a range of theoretical mathematical facts, it follows that the more precise the mensural terms are, the less accurate is the description. It would seem that there are innumerable situations where accuracy is inaccurate; Aristotle knew this, but the Neo-Aristotelians have forgotten it.

And at the beginning of the play, King Lear has never known it. The test that he sets for his daughters in the first scene is of course an impossible one. Goneril, even in the

midst of her falsehood, has an inkling of this; certainly words cannot "wield the matter" of love. But Cordelia, though she knows the right course to follow, to "love, and be silent" (I. i. 61), is forced by her father to fall into that very mathematical bias that is his besetting intellectual sin. Little attention need be given to such efforts as have been made to justify Cordelia's later misfortunes by considering them the consequences of a tragic flaw of pride and obstinacy. The fact is, when Lear insists on words, words then she must produce, though knowing that all language must go wide of the mark. And in the search for greater linguistic precision she offends against her own truth. "I love you according to my bond, no more nor less," "I return to you the duties you performed for me," "I shall give you half my love, and my husband the other half": these are indeed frigid mathematical computations in a sphere where mathematics should not enter. But, as has been said, she has been compelled to such hair-splitting, and she knows better. She knows that words are not a mere reflection of reality, but that, by slipping into the realm of the ideal, they can anticipate reality and induce it to follow in their wake. So at the end of the scene she will not call her sisters' faults as they are named (I. i. 270-71). Kent also, Cordelia's counterpart, apparently hopes that Goneril and Regan will bring their behavior into line with their protestations, wishing "that good effect may spring from words of love" (I. i. 185).

On the other hand, Lear's linguistic madness is deeply ingrained and not easily curable. It is his trust in the equivalence of words and things which prompts him in the first place to his foolish enterprise of surrendering parts of his kingdom which shall reproduce proportionately in physical wealth and extent the expressed affections of his daughters. He is obviously accustomed to having his words converted immediately into things; throughout his presumably long reign, to command has been for him tantamount to having

his language take instant shape in reality. He has thus become blinded to the slippery behavior of words, their tendency to glide away from the particular to the universal, to fix that universal into an ideal, and, in reversion, to force actual non-verbal particulars into this ideal mold. He should not have been old before he had been wise, as the Fool reminds him (I. v. 40); his tardy education commences with the word "daughter." A daughter who is a daughter yet who is not what a daughter should be is no daughter at all. Lear is shocked at the inappropriateness of applying the term to a person who so little fulfills the definition. In the scene where he is reprimanded by Goneril for the misconduct of his knights, his first reaction is to ask, "Are you our daughter?" (I. iv. 212); "I should be false persuaded I had daughters," he continues, and, when Goneril suggests that he a little disquantity his train, he posts away in fury to Regan, exclaiming, "Yet have I left a daughter." Simultaneously he begins to doubt the identity of "Lear" with the Lear now being so un-ideally abused, and the identity of "Goneril" with the abuser. "Does any here know me? This is not Lear," he rants, and of Goneril he inquires, "Your name, fair gentlewoman?"

Consequently, when he runs across the Dover plain "fantastically dressed in flowers" (IV. vi), the discrepancy between words and ideal reality drives him to the depths of his madness. Swinging to the opposite extreme, he weighs nature in the balance and finds it wanting; the word "adultery" is only a word, no more, and "justice" is a mere mocking sound. Because the natural does not correspond to the ideal always, he concludes that it never does so: there is no ideal ("None does offend, none, I say none" [IV. vi. 168]) and nature, which is all that exists, is rotten. And yet his perception of this discrepancy is his first step back on the road to sanity. In his recovery scene (IV. vii), when he awakens in Cordelia's camp, he doubts that his hands are his hands, that Cordelia

is his child, that her tears are wet; but his doubt is exactly the opposite of that outraged indignation which was poured out when Goneril did not instantly translate his word into the deed; rather, at this point, the doubt is a realization that things are not always as they are named.

Shakespeare symbolizes this refutation of the equation "Words equal things" by using a folklore motif, the "Love like salt" story, that appears in many versions in many parts of the world. The story, in brief, is that a daughter is asked by her father how much she loves him. She replies, "I love you as I love salt." Angered, he banishes her from his presence, but in the ensuing days he learns how necessary salt really is. He therefore admits his mistake, and there is a reconciliation.

Obviously the tale is an example of the well-known primitive delight in riddles; and riddles and similar nonsense formulae, we may suspect, were not originally mere amusements of children. Along with other arcane lore, they must have been imparted to those being initiated into *rites de passage*, or into secret phratries, or into professional shamanism itself. Guessing, or having told to him, the answers to riddles was only one of the ordeals that the initiate had to suffer before he could undergo the rebirth into a higher order of being. Acquiring the answer to the riddle gave him insight into the hidden nature of the world and bestowed on him powers that he had not previously possessed. So Siegfried, after fathoming Wotan's riddles, is able to break the god's spear and enter the magic circle of fire unscathed, and so Oedipus, after replying to the Sphinx's question, which had meant death to so many before him, automatically becomes a man above the common level of men. Shakespeare's sources had already dropped the "love like salt" motif, but had retained its essential feature: the lack of one-to-one correspondence between words and things. Yet the philosophical insight into the vagaries of language, into what one might call

the Mystery of the Word, since it reflects the mystery of man's mind itself, was implicit even in the primitive initiatory ceremony.

III

One cannot help remembering in connection with this line of thought about language that one of the problems troubling philosophers of science is the suspicion that mathematics, the quintessential scientific language, may be only a vast and elaborate tautology, and that all of scientific theory itself may be only a "logical construct." This is not surprising, once we realize that mathematics is intended to describe a natural universe which for practical purposes must be thought of as a closed equilibrium, in which nothing can disappear without being replaced by its equivalent. From the assumption that reality is stable enough to be described it is easy to proceed to the assumption that its stability is constant beneath its apparent multiformity. Hence we arrive at the second naturalistic equation: things equal things; or effects equal causes, causes equal effects. Form succeeds form; the younger generation crowds out—in fact, devours—the old ("age is unnecessary"); nothing comes from nothing, nothing can be produced from nothing; but all things change into all other things as the circle of nature, that Heraclitean fire, ceaselessly turns and burns. So the great image of the Wheel of Fire dominates *Lear*. And the result for a human being, who must from this viewpoint be regarded as a thing made up of things which are doomed to disintegrate and reintegrate into different things, is despair and meaninglessness. For in the over-all tautology he is only a term whose meaning is to be found only if he is redefined in other terms, which in turn may be redefined in others, and so on *ad infinitum*. All mortals, then, like Lear are "bound upon a wheel of fire which their poor tears scald like burning lead" (IV. vii. 46-48). Lear's first equation then merges

into the second, for not merely did he wish to have his daughters' love reproduced in words, but he also wished to compensate their love by a proportionate amount of his physical domain. Here, of course, the equating process breaks down. However necessary a principle the conservation of matter and energy may be for our manipulation of the physical, it is obviously inadequate when we proceed to the realm of the ethical. Yet if this world and this life are all that exists, which is the basic assumption of naturalism, it is reasonable to suppose that our deserts should be rewarded with this-worldly satisfaction and our demerits punished with this-worldly pain. Since the plot of *Lear* is contrived in such a way as to negate emphatically that this is so, many critics, who take Lear's second equation for granted, are reduced to reading the drama as a celebration of despair. Like Lear, they are loath to be parted from the naive notion that Nature's compensatory principle is a matter of visible reciprocation. Lear begins to learn his lesson when his acts of bounteous giving are reversed by his two elder daughters, who progressively reduce the size of his retinue; yet the pattern of his former thinking persists: when Regan allows him but twenty-five knights, he pitifully turns again to Goneril, whom he has cursed, with the words: "I'll go with thee:/ Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,/And thou art twice her love" (II. iv. 258-60). That such equational reasoning is inadequate the critics might have perceived from a careful scrutiny of two juxtaposed speeches at the end of the play, where Albany, "with easy, unthinking optimism," promises (V. iii. 302 ff.) that "All friends shall taste/ The wages of their virtue, and all foes/ The cup of their deservings"—a hint that he is about to repeat all the errors that the old King has made before him—only to be interrupted, and contradicted, by Lear's lament of inequality: "And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!/ Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life/ And thou no breath at all?" For Nature, viewed as the All,

as the naturalist views it, is not a system of smooth replacement and recompense, but a kind of balanced chaos in which things devour and obliterate one another "like monsters of the deep" (IV. ii. 50). It is not a child's game of handy-dandy, but a war to the death, in which a creature may only subsist on the slain bodies of his fellows. Even as Gloucester says, naturalistically if erroneously, about astrology: ". . . though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. . . ." (I. ii. 99 ff.). Nature annihilates itself: "Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand/ For lifting food to't?" (III. iv. 15 f.) Lear says of his "pelican daughters."

It follows that good and evil are obtrusions into Nature; they strike the circle of natural causation, as it were, at a tangent. ("Some good I mean to do/ Despite of mine own nature," [V. iii. 243-44] says Edmund at the last.) According to Occam's law, they should to naturalists be dispensable concepts, provided of course the naturalists could ignore the ethical and personal aspects of their experience. That good and evil are superfluities from the standpoint of causation can easily be seen from the consideration that an evil action is, and has to be, just as adequately caused as a good one, even as an erroneous conclusion, to the logicians' embarrassment, is as fully caused as a truthful one. Nevertheless, ethical conditions are obviously operative in the stream of cause and effect, striking it, as said before, at a tangent and altering its direction or intensity: Edmund means to *do* some good, despite his own nature. The explanation seems to be that causality may be viewed externally and impersonally, as the scientist views it, whereupon it becomes a sheer supplantation of things by other things, but that this is not the only possible way to view it. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were quite right to point out that the genesis of our whole concept of causality probably lies in a personal and internal approach, since we most intimately perceive the working of one action's

leading to another when the spiritual decisions of the will eventuate, through an uninterrupted continuum, in physical consequences: we say silently to our right arm, for instance, "Rise up," and it rises; the intention passes imperceptibly into its fulfillment. This is what gives us this indelible impression of causality, as a current of power streaming through a series of events, that no amount of Humean argument about mere sequentiality can eradicate. T. H. Huxley used to dumbfound his hearers into an acquiescence with his own determinism by posing the question: "I ask you, gentlemen, can you change your constitutions?"; one can only regret that no Schopenhauerian in the audience ever countered with the obvious reply, "Of course I can, to a limited degree, by the way I choose to eat and sleep and exercise." The upshot is that man may be less logically justified in transferring the impersonal analogy to his own inner life than he would be in transferring the personal analogy to the outer universe, thus picturing the latter as primarily an interplay of personal wills. According to such a world-view, life then becomes a confrontation of an I with a Thou, or with several Thou's, which by the rationalist is regarded as an aberration of the primitive and mythic mentality, but which such philosophers as Martin Buber and certain existentialists have shown can perfectly well be entertained by a sophisticated modern thinker. King Lear, admittedly, is never without the conviction that natural phenomena are set in motion by a will; he begins, however, as does Edmund, by identifying the will with Nature itself ("Hear, Nature, hear! Dear Goddess, hear!") and then attempts to subdue this will to his own (with his orders to the winds in the storm-scenes). Only gradually does he approach the profound conception that these phenomena are expressions of a Will infinitely superior to himself ("as if we were God's spies"—or "gods' spies": it makes little difference), and only perhaps at the very end, if then, does he arrive at the height of realization (which Gloucester

reaches after his failure at suicide) that this transcendent Will is "opposeless" and through its working on the individual human being has purposes for him which are not his own purposes.

Enid Welsford showed a generation ago that Lear is the Mock-King, the Fool-King, the Holy Fool, the Scapegoat. By his travails and humiliations, throughout the central part of the drama, he shows himself to be the same sort of figure that Pentheus is in Euripides' *Bacchae* or Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. It is needless to elaborate on the implications of this theory; Shakespeare uses this myth to counter and confute a mere mechanical concept of causality, what we have called Lear's second equation. When the personal element enters into considerations of causality, then the equational balance is upset: causes may be less or larger than their effects, effects less or larger than their causes. Just as the Mock-King was loaded with honors that he did not merit, so he was subsequently afflicted with sufferings that he did not deserve. In the same way Lear and his companion-figure Gloucester became "more sinned against than sinning."

To make clear the superfluity of the factors of good and evil, it is of interest to behold how Shakespeare has played off the two sisters, Goneril and Cordelia, against each other. Goneril is a perfect illustration of the Biblical text: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (*Matt.* 18:7). She is the embodiment of the superfluity of evil; she anticipates the wickedness of other men and strikes her blow first. She "must do something, and i' the heat" (*I. i.* 306); she instructs her steward Oswald to "Put on what weary negligence you please," as she would "have it come to question" (*I. iii.* 13-14); and she informs her husband, "Fools do those villains pity who are punish'd/ Ere they have done their mischief" (*IV. ii.* 54-55). One might say that Goneril, assuming a balanced circularity of natural causation, thinks that it is a small matter whether a man

requisites an injury before or after it is tendered, except that in the former case he shows himself more clearly not to be a "moral fool" and except that to "fear too far is safer than trust too far." No wonder, then, that when Lear is informed that she and her tigerish sister Regan "desperately are dead," he replies, "Ay, so I think," (V. iii. 292), as though they could have died in no other way than "desperately" and "untimely," as Cornwall and Oswald and Edmund do, dying without that hope which none of them has ever possessed.

On the other hand, Cordelia represents that superfluity of good which goes the second mile and which, when sued for a coat, lets one have the cloak also. What she "well intends, she'll do't before she speaks" (I. i. 225-26). Because of what France calls her "tardiness in nature/ Which often leaves the history unspoke/ That it intends to do" (I. i. 235-37) she is "most rich, being poor;/ Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd" (I. i. 253-54), and she seems to fulfill the prophecy of the Fool in having "more/ Than two tens to a score" (I. iv. 132-33). She moreover interrupts the chain of cause-and-effect by ignoring and nullifying the precedent actions that might have been of offence to her; her response to Lear's "If you have poison for me, I will drink it./ I know you do not love me; for your sisters/ Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:/ You have some cause, they have not," is the ineffably poignant "No cause, no cause" (IV. vii. 72 ff.). She is Forgiveness incarnate, and from her Lear learns the lesson: "When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,/ And ask of thee forgiveness" (V. iii. 10-11). In Cordelia the natural reciprocal law of Justice passes over into the transcendent principle of Grace. She is a "soul in bliss," who redeems "nature from the general curse," a sort of personified intervention of Super-Nature into the natural scheme of causation, escaping the Wheel of Fire precisely because she confounds natural reciprocity by returning good for evil, love for hatred.

IV

We come to the last of the naturalistic equations, the one that states that "Human beings equal things." This assumption took its most pernicious form in the Stoic doctrine of *autarkeia*, "self-sufficiency." It was believed that the essential self is a composite of simple and easily satisfied needs, that these few needs can be ascertained with the aid of reason, that the self thus stripped of superfluities can constitute itself independent and self-sufficient, and that in this way its particular place in nature can be defined and its particular natural duties discharged. Far from regarding the self as a transcendent *infinitum* of potential development, the dominant thought of pagan philosophy worked in the opposite direction, toward a diminution, a retrenchment, a cutting-down. Lear's journey through the storm is, from this point of view, a symbolic exposition of the inadequacies of this philosophy. Forcibly stripped of the enjoyment of luxury and the prerogatives of power, the old king not unnaturally supposes that he is to be taught a lesson in Stoic self-sufficiency; for the Stoic sage, having cut himself down to the bare essentials, could be calm amid the vicissitudes of external fortune. So when the tempest breaks upon him, Lear tries "with presented nakedness" to "outface/ The winds and persecutions of the sky" (II. iii. 11-12) and "Strives in his little world of man to out-storm/ The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain" (III. i. 10-11). And having encountered Edgar (III. iv), Lear mistakes him for a pagan philosopher, noting that in all respects Edgar fulfills the requirements, since he wears only a ragged cloak, lives in a hovel or in the open, drinks ditch-water, and eats "rats and mice and such small deer." Hence Lear addresses him as "noble philosopher," "learned Theban," and "good Athenian," and wishes to discuss "the cause of thunder" with him, having already apparently recognized in him the model of the natural way to

live: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated" (III. iv. 100 ff.). Yet there are notes of disillusionment in this discovery of the Stoic *autarkeia*, for Lear continues: "Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art." It is a philosophy of reasoned despair that Lear is approaching, and though he is willing to signalize his embracing it by tearing off his clothes, he has already prefaced his conversion with the observation that Edgar would be "better in his grave than to answer with his uncovered body this extremity of the skies." That this retrenchment to essential needs is ultimately no way to live, but merely a way to die continually Lear should have recollected from his treatment by his elder daughters, whose cutting-down of his knights from fifty to twenty-five to ten to five to one to none symbolizes just such a process of reduction, and who provoke him to his great speech beginning, "O reason not the need; our basest beggars/ Are in the poorest things superfluous:/ Allow not nature more than nature needs,/ Man's life is cheap as beast's" (II. iv. 264 ff.).

The truth is that reason cannot arrive at a natural minimum to which a human being can be reduced. The minimum that reason leads to when it tries to ascertain the necessities of a man's existence in the scheme of nature is precisely nothing; for there is no reason why a man should exist at all. Thus the symbol of man in the natural universe is Lear tearing "his white hair,/ Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,/ Catch in their fury, and make nothing of" (III. i. 7-9) and running unbonneted through the rain, bidding "what will take all" (III. i. 13-14). The Stoic compromise, to be contented with little, is a false one, because Nature takes even that little away. Edgar's misfortunes typify this truth; betrayed and disinherited, he comforts himself with the

thought, "To be worst/ The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,/ Stands still in esperance" (IV. i. 2-4), only to be straightway harrowed by the spectacle of his blinded and persecuted father and forced to concede, "The worst is not,/ So long as we can say, 'This is the worst.'" (27-28). Just as "the clearest Gods, who make them honors/ Of men's impossibilities" (IV. vi. 73-74) can lift a man from plane to plane of transcendent being, each level unimaginable before, so the strokes of fortune can debase him from depth to depth of misery, to fling him away into final nothingness.

Nor is mere endurance the answer. The Stoics made much of the virtue of fortitude, and many a critic has found in *Lear* the preachment of a Stoical sermon. Yet it would seem that Shakespeare took some pains to show that patience is not enough. Patience may indeed be the "true need" as far as one's attitude toward Nature is concerned: this Lear intimates, as has been often noted, when he breaks off his "Reason not the need" speech with "But for true need,—/ You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" (II. iv. 270-71). And this patience he seems to have acquired in large measure by the time he delivers another climactic speech, the one beginning, "Come, let's away to prison" (V. iii. 8ff.), with all its essentially pagan-philosophical implications of withdrawal from the harsh realities and troublous involvements of the world. Yet by a supreme stroke of genius, Shakespeare did not let his plot rest here, but swept the action to the deaths of both father and daughter.

Patience does not suffice. A man may be patient unto death, and patient in dying, but afterwards his patience is as if it had never been, if this life and this world are all. If this life and this world are all, what is the meaning of this life and this world? They have no meaning. Their meaning, like all meanings, must be found in something that is not themselves, and hence in some supernatural and transcendent realm of being. Throughout the last part of *King Lear* this realm be-

live: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated" (III. iv. 100 ff.). Yet there are notes of disillusionment in this discovery of the Stoic *autarkeia*, for Lear continues: "Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art." It is a philosophy of reasoned despair that Lear is approaching, and though he is willing to signalize his embracing it by tearing off his clothes, he has already prefaced his conversion with the observation that Edgar would be "better in his grave than to answer with his uncovered body this extremity of the skies." That this retrenchment to essential needs is ultimately no way to live, but merely a way to die continually Lear should have recollected from his treatment by his elder daughters, whose cutting-down of his knights from fifty to twenty-five to ten to five to one to none symbolizes just such a process of reduction, and who provoke him to his great speech beginning, "O reason not the need; our basest beggars/ Are in the poorest things superfluous:/ Allow not nature more than nature needs,/ Man's life is cheap as beast's" (II. iv. 264 ff.).

The truth is that reason cannot arrive at a natural minimum to which a human being can be reduced. The minimum that reason leads to when it tries to ascertain the necessities of a man's existence in the scheme of nature is precisely nothing; for there is no reason why a man should exist at all. Thus the symbol of man in the natural universe is Lear tearing "his white hair,/ Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,/ Catch in their fury, and make nothing of" (III. i. 7-9) and running unbonneted through the rain, bidding "what will take all" (III. i. 13-14). The Stoic compromise, to be contented with little, is a false one, because Nature takes even that little away. Edgar's misfortunes typify this truth; betrayed and disinherited, he comforts himself with the

thought, "To be worst/ The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,/ Stands still in esperance" (IV. i. 2-4), only to be straightway harrowed by the spectacle of his blinded and persecuted father and forced to concede, "The worst is not,/ So long as we can say, 'This is the worst.'" (27-28). Just as "the clearest Gods, who make them honors/ Of men's impossibilities" (IV. vi. 73-74) can lift a man from plane to plane of transcendent being, each level unimaginable before, so the strokes of fortune can debase him from depth to depth of misery, to fling him away into final nothingness.

Nor is mere endurance the answer. The Stoics made much of the virtue of fortitude, and many a critic has found in *Lear* the preachment of a Stoical sermon. Yet it would seem that Shakespeare took some pains to show that patience is not enough. Patience may indeed be the "true need" as far as one's attitude toward Nature is concerned: this Lear intimates, as has been often noted, when he breaks off his "Reason not the need" speech with "But for true need,—/ You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" (II. iv. 270-71). And this patience he seems to have acquired in large measure by the time he delivers another climactic speech, the one beginning, "Come, let's away to prison" (V. iii. 8ff.), with all its essentially pagan-philosophical implications of withdrawal from the harsh realities and troublous involvements of the world. Yet by a supreme stroke of genius, Shakespeare did not let his plot rest here, but swept the action to the deaths of both father and daughter.

Patience does not suffice. A man may be patient unto death, and patient in dying, but afterwards his patience is as if it had never been, if this life and this world are all. If this life and this world are all, what is the meaning of this life and this world? They have no meaning. Their meaning, like all meanings, must be found in something that is not themselves, and hence in some supernatural and transcendent realm of being. Throughout the last part of *King Lear* this realm be-

gins to vouchsafe glimpses of itself. God, or the gods, intervene to show that man is more than a thing in nature. The Myth of the Unknown Champion, who appears out of the blue to overcome triumphant evil, serves as refutation to Lear's third equation. Like Lohengrin from Monsalvat, like the many guileless fools of medieval legend who appear in blazonless arms to upset or displace the acknowledged, but sin-stained, masters of the tourney, Edgar appears against Edmund to strike a blow for heavenly justice. Thus the transcendent power of divinity is made manifest in human affairs. And yet these divine powers do not thereby rescue Cordelia and Lear and, so contradicting themselves, vindicate the merely natural order. Father and daughter, having taken upon themselves "the mystery of things," are taken up into the mystery that is beyond all.

King Lear ends with a question, the religious question of faith: Is there another life than this which gives meaning to this? Many a critic has answered no. Shakespeare permits them to do so, provided that they will face the full horror of meaninglessness that such an answer entails. Yet one cannot help suspecting that he himself took a different road, the road that blind Gloucester took to Dover, with its wonderfully symbolic "leap in the dark," that proves to be a leap away from the fiends to blessedness, from despair to hope, and that he intended to convey to his auditor, as Edgar assures his father, "Thy life's a miracle." The noblest answer of naturalism is not noble enough. So unreasonable are the conditions of man's life, so outrageous are the humiliations inflicted on him by an inexorable Nature, that they can be coped with only by a response equally outrageous and unreasonable: the response of love and faith. A man must not merely be patient, but he must carry through the resolve of Lear: "No, I will be the pattern of all patience;/ I will say nothing." (III. ii. 37-38). The "pattern of all patience" is Christ himself, who said nothing at His trial; the Christlike

figure of Cordelia likewise said "Nothing" in her ordeal; yet in spite of Lear's and the naturalist's "Nothing can come from nothing," the spectator of this tragedy is left with the feeling that out of such "Nothings" as Christ's and Cordelia's comes nothing less than all.

YEATSIAN ART AND MATHEMATIC FORM¹

Hazard Adams

I

YEATS'S LONG OPPOSITION to the separation of science from philosophy—"the opium of the suburbs," as he called it in his 1930 diary—is well known. To the extent that he associated mathematics with a science which split experience into subject and object, primary and secondary qualities of experience, he opposed mathematics too. But this opposition was more emotional than rational. He saw in mathematics a convenient symbol for the grey materialism of Lockean nature. In his last prosework, the argumentative *On the Boiler*, he restated his objection: "The mathematician Poincaré, according to Henry Adams, described space as the creation of our ancestors, meaning, I conclude, that mind split itself into mind and space. Space was to antiquity mind's inseparable 'other,' coincident with objects, the table not the place it occupies. During the seventeenth century it was separated from mind and objects alike, and thought of as a nothing yet a reality, the place not the table, with material objects separated from taste, smell, sound, from all the mathematician could not measure for its sole inhabitant, and this new matter and space men were told had preceded mind and would live after." Yeats rejected this modern view, arguing for the supremacy of mind: "Nature or reality as known to poets and tramps has no moment, no impression, no perception like another, everything is unique and nothing

¹ A considerably shorter version of this paper was delivered before the Literature and Science Group of the Modern Language Association meetings, December 27, 1958.

unique is measurable." Yeats argued that no really educated man today believed in the Lockean world but that nevertheless: "... deductions made by those who believed in [objective matter and the space of modern science] dominate the world." People seemed to want certainty, and mathematics with its undeniable "two and two" provided it. It was the generalizing, measuring power of science expressed in the image of mathematics, not necessarily the attitude of the mathematician, which Yeats opposed. The tendency to generalize, Yeats thought, had led to materialism, which had made possible in its turn the substitution "for the old humanity with its unique irreplaceable individuals something that can be chopped and measured like a piece of cheese." In *Plays and Controversies*, with the same emotional symbol in his mind, he wrote: "Somebody has said that every nation begins with poetry and ends with algebra, and passion has always refused to express itself in algebraical terms."

Elsewhere he wrote that man had made mathematics, but God reality. In context the statement was a witty, emotional foray against materialist science. Twisted from context it could be thought of as praise of man's creative intelligence. And there is good reason to so twist it. In spite of Yeats's outcries against materialism and the mathematical handmaiden he appointed for it, the reading out of context is a more accurate expression of Yeats's true philosophical view.² His rebellion against mathematics was greatly limited by the boundaries which he himself imposed upon it. He rebelled against mathematics as an expression of materialist science, but he

² Others have noted Yeats's interest in mathematics. See especially M. B. Srigley, "The Mathematical Muse," *Dublin Magazine*, XXXI (New Series), 3 (July-September, 1956), 13-21. He argues that for Yeats mathematics primarily conveyed the idea of a "fixed order of things to which the transience of human experience might be related and so enriched." See also Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 188-189; also, p. 243 for an unpublished poem by Yeats criticizing mathematics. T. R. Henn, in *The Lonely Tower* (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 308, states, "I am clear that this apparent obsession with measurement is more profound than any mere numerology." He attributes it partially to the influence of Blake's "The Ancient of Days."

wrote in his epitaph poem: "Measurement began our might."³ And it is clear that as he became more and more interested in philosophy, he grew to admire mathematics as a self-contained symbolic system. It is also true that the idea of history by which he assented to the view of nations growing and decaying in some nearly predictable order was inspired by an analogy with mathematics. And this idea of history was inextricably related to his idea of poetry, growing as it did from the same system of thought. It is, in fact, upon a rather elaborate, if rough, analogy with mathematics that the system of Yeats's *A Vision* is built; and *A Vision*, ostensibly an occultist explanation of reality, history, and the types of human personality, is ultimately a commentary upon the nature of poetry, the position of the poet, and the values and limitations of the peculiar kind of knowledge which the poet can express.

At the beginning of *A Vision* in the section called "A Packet for Ezra Pound," Yeats writes that having finished his own book he may now read Pound's work in progress more carefully: "I may, now that I have recovered leisure, find that the mathematical structure [of the *Cantos*], when taken up into imagination, is more than mathematical, that seemingly irrelevant details fit together into a single theme."⁴ This statement has been taken to show that Yeats misunderstood what Pound was trying to do, but it can just as easily be taken as an expression of a profound analogy between poetry in general and mathematics, which the remainder of the book develops. The bulk of *A Vision* presents a cyclical view of existence both on the level of universal history and that of the single human life. Yeats saw the life of the world reflected as in a mirror in the life of each microcosmic world, man. The basis of his description of these cycles was his well-

³ "Under Ben Bulbin," *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 342.

⁴ *A Vision* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 5. I refer throughout to the second version of *A Vision*, first published in 1937.

known and much discussed set of geometrical symbols upon which could be plotted the movement of history and human personality through twenty-eight moon phases. It is through this geometrical system, bordering on astrology and sometimes adopting the symbolism of alchemy, that Yeats presents a hidden analogy between art and mathematics. His willingness to allow the occult disciplines of astrology and alchemy to serve his system was undoubtedly dictated by an intuition that these disciplines—especially astrology—arose in a period of thought during which mathematics was slowly emancipating itself from its primitive attachment to the world of objects. In primitive language and mythical thinking, the idea of number is originally fused with the designation of things. "The differentiation of numbers," as Cassirer has pointed out in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, "starts like that of spatial relations, from the human body and its members," and gradually proceeds to the designation of objects in the outer world. These objects are thought of by the primitive mind as extensions of the human body itself, for to the primitive mind the outer world is itself a human body. The use of numbers was originally reserved, then, for the description and designation of objects.

As long as number held itself to the designation of objects, it was not purely mathematical in the modern sense. Astrology, for example, though a system of numbers, is what Cassirer has called "a kind of hybrid, a semi-mythical 'science' of nature." As such, it stands between purely primitive myth and pure mathematics, for pure mathematics is freed from *designating objects*. Its symbols have a purely self-intentive reference. The analogy which Yeats saw with poetry is obvious. Poetry, to a certain extent, has this same self-intentive quality. It is true that like the symbols of mathematics, those of poetry may be applied—and constantly are applied—to the so-called outer world which we like to think of as reality. Though there is apparently a total attachment of linguistic

symbol to objects—as in the primitive use of numerical symbols—these symbols take on a meaning at least as dependent upon interrelationships within literature and the poem as upon so-called outer designation. Yeats's great respect for the "mathematic form" of Greek art arose from his understanding that art's autonomy was analogous to that of mathematics and that the strong sense of an independent life in Greek sculpture arose from the artist's concern with proportion mathematically conceived. A similar attitude is apparent in *Anatomy of Criticism*, where Northrop Frye has taken the poetic-mathematic analogy as the basis for the following remark: "The child beginning geometry is presented with a dot and is told, first, that that is a point, and second, that it is not a point. He cannot advance until he accepts both statements at once. It is absurd that that which is no number can also be a number, but the result of accepting the absurdity was the discovery of zero. The same kind of hypothesis exists in literature, where Hamlet and Falstaff neither exist nor do not exist, and where an airy nothing is confidently located and named."

II

It is significant that Yeats's mathematics in *A Vision* is closely related at times to astrology, because in astrology we see mathematics still primitively aligned with outer reality, and in this sense astrological symbolism joins in a single whole the mathematical, formal abstract with the intuitionist concrete—those two aspects necessary to art. Nevertheless, Yeats's astrological symbolism does not perform astrological duties; its uses are poetic. The analogy between astrology and art is, after all, imperfect. To see it perfect would be similar to equating the drawings of Blake to the elaborate, abstract designs of the alchemists and Rosicrucians.⁵ In

⁵ See M. O. Percival, *William Blake's Circle of Destiny* (New York, 1938), pp. 8-9.

Yeats's *A Vision* the astrological symbolism is an extended metaphor for the position of his art midway between abstract and raw experience. In this sense, Yeats's system is worthy of serious consideration. What it finally expresses is very similar to what Frye has expressed about the relation between mathematics and literature. If mathematics is an autonomous set of interlocking symbols, then one may be right in suspecting that our reality is revealed to us *only* through a variety of these "stylistic arrangements,"⁶ of which poetry as well as mathematics is one.

In the expression of his theory Yeats was an artist. He seldom, if ever, wrote purely discursive prose, and even in expressing his aesthetic, he managed to do it within the fabric of a book which described him ironically as his own enemy—a man hemmed in by his own narrow reasoning power. Throughout the various sections of *A Vision*, particularly in the introduction in which he describes the fantastic experience of receiving the rudimentary symbolism of his system from "instructors" who communicated to him through the automatic writing and speech of his wife, he describes himself as continuously skeptical, slow to comprehend the meaning of the symbols, and tied to the scientific modes of thought dominant in his age. So at times it seems as if he is ready to turn over to mathematics all of the virtues of poetry, disparaging that symbolic form which he wishes to prove as capable as any other of revealing reality. "Will some mathematician," he writes, "someday question and understand, as I cannot, and confirm all, or have I also dealt in myth?" It is as if mathematical thought might not only confirm his poetic insights, but also give them the only meaningful sanction possible by proceeding from them. But this is Yeats, the actor, speaking in his own drama. Elsewhere he writes that those in other disciplines—scientists particularly—may feel as he does: ". . . some few, meeting the limit in

⁶ The phrase is from Yeats's description of his "system" in *A Vision*, p. 25.

their special study, even doubt if there is any common experience, doubt the possibility of science."

The bulk of *A Vision* is devoted to the explanation of the instructors' geometrical symbols, the application of this symbolism to the explanation of various types of personality, and finally the expression of a cyclical theory of history. But as I have already suggested, the apparently discursive, explanatory material is prefaced by a comically ironic description of Yeats's experiences in trying to master the system. The conclusion of the book is also ironic, but here the tone is tragic, emphasizing the endless striving and failure of man to capture reality in his symbols. In the final few pages, the explications completed, Yeats describes himself as sitting alone still pondering the problem of knowledge, considering what he has accomplished: "Day after day I have sat in my chair turning a symbol over in my mind, exploring all its details, defining and again defining its elements, testing my own convictions and those of others by its unity, attempting to substitute particulars for an abstraction like that of algebra Then I draw myself up into the symbol and it seems as if I should know all if I could but banish such memories and find everything in the symbol."⁷ In the end, Yeats shows us that the analogy between art and mathematics, rather than clarifying the relation of man's symbolic forms to some solid outer reality, merely stabilizes our sense of mystery in still another area of our endeavor. Mathematics and, to a lesser extent, poetry are autonomous, it is true. Their structures and laws are primarily those of inner necessity. And yet man can fully gather himself up into neither. He is a time-borne, space-bound creature. His intuitions of reality come to him in such a variety of forms that to "draw himself up into the symbol" is never quite possible. In his most profound symbolizations man is never certain whether or not he has found

⁷ For further discussion of this aspect of *A Vision*, see my *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), chapters 7 and 8.

reality and therefore contends always with the multiplicity of nature. In a letter to Sturge Moore, Yeats wrote: "... I try always to keep my philosophy within such classifications of thought as will keep it to such experience as seems a natural life. I prefer to include in my definition of water a little duckweed or a few fish. I have never met that poor naked creature H_2O ." One must be able to *imagine* the Hamlet that is not a man, just as one often refers his mathematical symbols back to experience. The warring contraries of man's experience, as Heraclitus knew, are to be resolved neither in art and mathematics, nor in practical science; but, if anywhere, in a life that contains them both.

I have already suggested that in one respect at least poetry's tendency toward abstract perfection falls farther short than does mathematics, and it is here that Yeats saw his analogy between poetry and mathematics reach its limit. A mathematical relation can exist in a pure form to which reality, so-called, may or may not have its applicability. But human words, no matter how they are used, possess content. Tobias Dantzig has written in *Number, the Language of Science*: "Only by using a symbolic language not yet usurped by those vague ideas of *space, time, continuity*, which have their origin in intuition and tend to obscure pure reason—only thus may we hope to build mathematics on the sound foundation of logic." Even words which abstractly designate classes, Dantzig points out, "have also the capacity to evoke an image." Poetry remains attached, however tenuously, to the realm from which pure mathematics was freed when it divorced itself from the designatory stultifications of astrology and myth. This does not indicate a cultural lag in the development of poetry, for the attachment of poetry to things is, of course, its unique virtue. Should it succeed in total emancipation from things, then it would merge with mathematics or become simply meaningless sound set in a temporal pattern. Thus it would cease to present its own formulation of reality.

As it is, poetry attaches itself to experience by a symbolization of time and space—vague as the mathematician might think it—never far from our own raw experience; and yet the degree of autonomy which it has from our experience of things is the very means by which it asserts for us a greater sense of reality than formless experience can contain.

In his cryptic poem "The Statues," Yeats describes the abstract yet concretely experiential aspect of art by embodying the convergence of the intuitional concrete and the mathematical abstract in Greek sculpture. The roots of this convergence Yeats traces to Pythagoras both in the first line of his poem and in his last prosework *On the Boiler*, where a sentence casts light upon the poem's first stanza: "There are moments when I am certain that art must once again accept those Greek proportions which carry into plastic art the Pythagorean numbers, those faces which are divine because all there is empty and measured." He refers, of course, to the mathematical proportion to which Greek representations of the human body conformed. This mathematical concreteness, similar to Pythagoras's primitive theory of number, causes the people of Yeats's poem to give the statues startled attention:

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.

The word "character" here is significant in the light of particular meaning Yeats gives to it in *A Vision* and the abstract quality which Yeats saw in mathematics. He differentiated between character and personality in his system for judging human types. The distinction, however, would seem to be meaningless applied to a statue, which transcends the temporal or human condition and lacks "character" and humanity. And yet the statue does have a face, if an abstract one:

this ambivalence is what seems to draw human passion toward it, investing it with a kind of life foreign to time:

But boys and girls, pale from imagined love
Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
That passion could bring character enough,
And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

The boys and girls see, perhaps unconsciously, in the statues an ideal objectification of their passion, where lack of character becomes the virtue of freedom from materiality and animality, the solitariness of their beds representing the solipsism of a materialist existence. In an interesting and not widely known essay called "The Tragic Theatre," written thirty years before "The Statues," Yeats wrote: "And when we love, if it be in the excitement of youth, do we not also, that the flood may find no stone to convulse, no wall to narrow it, exclude character or the signs of it by choosing that beauty which seems unearthly because the individual woman is lost amid the labyrinth of its lines as though life were trembling into stillness and silence, or at last folding itself away?" The similarity to the lines above from "The Statues" is hardly accidental; if we examine this essay more closely we find Yeats holding that in tragic or lyric poetry there is a total absence of character or a tendency to destroy its presence: "We may not find either mood in its purity, but in mainly tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images." Character is "continuously present in comedy alone." The statues have "character enough," at least for the boys and girls; for the boys and girls desire

to harmonize character and form. The statues have the "rhythm" and "balance" of mathematics, as well as the "image" of the world to which they both do and do not belong.

III

Yeats would say ultimately about Pythagoras the same thing that he would say about an astrologer. Pythagoras's numerical symbolic ideas, like the astrologer's charts, are not statues, not works of art. Neither Pythagoras nor the astrologer is an artist, though each can serve as a symbol of the artist's position. The artist is greater because he creates the object, not the plan:

No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities.

The artist makes the numbers converge with an imitation of life as we know it, and this for Yeats is a greater triumph than Pythagoras's brand of earthy, but for that reason imperfect, mathematics. It is possible, then, to take the best of the naive realists' vision and beat it into abstract forms. Casual flesh and number can become fused in one object. It was the attachment to concretion in the Western world which repelled the vague massive abstractions of Eastern thought when they threatened Europe.

And not the banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis.
Europe put off that foam when Phidias
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

Culturally speaking, at least, Phidian art is a symbol of that influx of concretion embodied in art which balanced West against East and protected Greece against an invasion more devastating than a military invasion could ever be. In "Doric

vigour" Yeats discovers historically a neutralization of the Eastern extreme; in *On the Boiler* he describes the same invasion referred to above: "Europe was not born when Greek galleys defeated the Persian hordes at Salamis, but when the Doric studios sent out those broad-backed marble statues against the multiform, vague, expressive Asiatic sea, they gave to the sexual instinct of Europe its goal, its fixed type. In the warm sea of the French and Italian Riviera I can still see it. I recall a Swedish actress standing upon some boat's edge between Portofino and Rapallo, or riding the foam upon a plank towed behind a speed boat." The idea of art as actually guiding the sexual instinct is part of the suggestion, then, of stanza one, where the boys and girls embrace an abstract *image*, the statue. The foam kicked up by the Persian oars as well as by the actress' aquaplane is symbolic of vagueness, but what the foam surrounds is different in the two cases. In Yeats's poem the Eastern foam compounds Asiatic vagueness; in the description of the actress, a modern image of the foam rising Aphrodite, the concrete embodiment of the ideal statue cuts through a Western foam and rides upon it, even rises out of it—the one image which crosses the many-headed. Phidian art Yeats thought of as "naturalistic" within the area of converging abstract and concrete, while the art of Callimachus, mentioned in "Lapis Lazuli," was "half-Asiatic." In the embodiment of the sexual ideal Phidias gave women dreams and also gave the abstract dream its image—a work of art which one can think of as a representation.

History is a vacillation between extremes, and in art the extremes of this vacillation may be expressed by the art of Phidias and that of Callimachus. In both arts there is always the convergence with which we are concerned—the abstract mathematic and the concrete. There is by definition no art without both, but the dominance of one over the other shifts along with more extreme shifts in life itself. There is always

a defense in art against the naive realist. Callimachus is always present to reject an impulse toward materialistic ruthlessness, which seems to be the dominant impulse, especially since the Renaissance, of Western man. In "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Yeats views the naturalistic drama of his age and seeks another kind of form. He would act the Callimachus in his own time and go to Asia: "It may be well if we go to Asia, for the distance from life in European art has come from little but difficulty with material. In half-Asiatic Greece Callimachos could still return to a stylistic management of the falling folds of drapery, after the naturalistic drapery of Phidias, and in Egypt the same age that saw the village Headman carved in wood, for burial in some tomb, with so complete a naturalism saw, set up in public places [see stanza 1], statues full of an august formality that implies traditional measurements, a philosophic defense." This return to the "half-Asiatic" abstract has happened before, and Yeats describes it in stanza 3: "One image crossed the many-headed, sat/ Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow." In *A Vision* he describes one such movement: "I identify the conquest of Alexander and the breakup of his kingdom, when Greek civilization, formalised and codified, loses itself in Asia, with the beginning and end of the 22nd Phase . . . he is but a part of the impulse that creates Hellenised Rome and Asia. There are everywhere statues where every muscle has been measured, every position debated, and these statues represent man with nothing more to achieve." The whole description of this phase of history is significant because in phase number it corresponds in Yeats's system to the period 1875-1927, during which time the events of stanza 4, Pearse summoning Cuchulain, did occur. What happened after Alexander's time may give us some idea of our own destiny.

A key to the difficult third stanza, as critics have pointed out, is a passage from Yeats's *Autobiography*. He is describing a portrait of William Morris: "Its grave wide-open eyes, like

the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's 'Ariosto,' while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every phantasy: the dreamer of the Middle Ages. It is 'the fool of fairy . . . wide and wild as a hill,' the resolute European image that yet half-remembers Buddha's motionless meditation, and has no trait in common with the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation, that cannot but because of certain famous Hamlets of our stage fill the mind's eye. Shakespeare himself foreshadowed a symbolic change, that is a change in the whole temperament of the world, for though he called his Hamlet 'fat' and even 'scant of breath,' he thrust between his fingers agile rapier and dagger."⁸ Relevance to the lines below is obvious:

No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
 Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
 That knowledge increases unreality, that
 Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.

The image of Morris, like that of the one which "crossed the many-headed" is that related to the Greek civilization which in Alexander's time "lost itself in Asia." In such an image there is a kind of balance between the abstract and concrete. The beast dreams, the body is fat; but the eyeballs are empty—not the pierced eyeballs of naturalistic Roman statuary but something between the "Grecian eyes staring at nothing" mentioned in *A Vision* and "those eyelids of China and of India, those vacant or half-vacant eyes weary of world and vision alike." Art ultimately rejects material knowledge. The materialist mind gives back only itself in a mirror, the world as multiplicity, the breaking up of the self. Empty eyeballs indicate the futility of knowledge as it has come to be defined in a scientific age. Nature, it is true, is all we "know"

⁸ *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 87. The relevance of this passage was first noticed, I believe, by Vivienne Koch, *W. B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 71.

according to this definition, but nature is the "mirror scaled serpent" of multiplicity crawling down the Sephirothic tree of death. "All the show" is unity—identity of macrocosm and microcosm—broken into the delusion of an infinite regress, the mirrors of the barber-chair.

In the last lines of the stanza we have been considering, a common Yeatsian image of the fallen life, the gong of time, rings at the typical Yeatsian moment of revelation: "When gong and conch declare the hour to bless/ Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness." Grimalkin is a homely female cat, and art thought of as prophecy is the act of a homely female cat crawling into the nothingness of knowledge redefined as release from space and time, filling the inexpressible, and thus useless, with a tactile content. If, alas, that content can often scratch and hiss at us, nevertheless its imperfection gives our ideals feeling and body. We are not left raging in a mad, abstract darkness.

To proceed now to the concluding stanza of Yeats's poem: The General Post Office in Dublin was the stronghold of the men who rebelled against English rule in 1916. To commemorate this ill-fated effort, of which Padraic Pearse was the leader, there now stands in the lobby a statue of the Irish mythological hero Cuchulain. It is to this ideal presence, now artistically conceived in bronze (it is a pity that the statue is not very impressive), that Yeats sees Pearse having addressed himself.

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?

The question of what knowledge, what real ideal Pearse was seeking is left unanswered. What did appear was some concrete embodiment of perhaps some pure desire. Whatever the ideal nothingness behind the appearance was, that which made itself apparent to Pearse can best be described by the analogy of art, visual yet mathematical,

In the last lines of "The Statues" Yeats describes the plight of Ireland, whose ancient traditions link it to the golden ages of European culture and to Pythagoras, afloat on the sea of an objective, materialistic civilization. Comparing the dreams of Ireland sadly and ironically to the dreams of the pale youths of stanza one, Yeats proceeds hopefully to suggest that the dream is worthwhile, to describe the Irish as seeking out the artistic ideal of the spiritualized body. Ireland must ascend like Grimalkin into the unknowable darkness and find in the conjunction of its own material wreckage with the ideal the outline and indeed the spiritual body of its desires. Cuchulain's coming to Pearse indicates the continued possibility of such an act, rare and heroic as it may be in the present age.

We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

The Asiatic sea was "multiform, vague, expressive," in contrast to the rubbish of materialism which is today's formless teeming world. What eventually emerges from history is a slow turn of naturalism from realistic representation to insipid generalization. When the turn is completed, it is, paradoxically, the abstract formalist who reintroduces reality through a shrinking from the "soulless self-reflections of man's skill," a medical accuracy, or a rhetorical art put to the service of material need. Yeats had rejected rhetoric years before, and he tells us in his *Autobiography* of his dislike for the rhetorical verse much praised in Ireland. On the other hand, it seems to me, Yeats saw much danger in purely symbolist poetry like that of the later Mallarmé. Frank Kermode, in his *Romantic Image*, has noted Yeats's awareness of the dangers of an autonomous poetic image "free of discursive content," a kind of solipsist poetry. Yeats wanted always the

household cat, and in his H₂O a few fish. Perhaps this explains the existence of the political ballads of his *Last Poems*.

In any case, we can rightly say that the distance which Grimalkin must travel to become art was the concern of Yeats from early in his career. Looking at the problem from the other side, as early as the volume called *The Rose* we find an introductory poem calling the Cabalistic rose to approach, only to ask it not to approach too close; and the concluding poem of that volume explains to Ireland that the poet has not ceased to write in her behalf despite "the red-rose-bordered hem" which "trails all about the written page." The rose is abstract, spiritual, a symbol of beauty. One must keep the rose in sight, but cannot give oneself up to it and still write poetry. In Yeats's later career other images replace the rose. One of these is mathematics.

IV

In his epitaph poem, "Under Ben Bulbin," Yeats speaks again of the earthy passion inherent in the mathematic form of Greek art—a humanization of the more strictly geometrical discipline of Egyptian forms. He calls this quality "profane perfection":

Measurement began our might:
Forms a stark Egyptian thought
Forms that gentler Phidias wrought
Michael Angelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof,
Where but half-awakened Adam
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
Proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

From the perspective of raw experience the profanity of art lies in its abstract autonomy, its mathematic form, its prideful presumption that it may yet escape from experience. From

the perspective of the abstractionist its profanity lies in its attachment to objects. The fact that art reaches out in both directions is its "profane perfection." This fact, it seems to me, leads to Yeats's ultimately tragic vision of the artist, who by defining his own activity condemns himself to keeping one foot always in the fallen world. The saint, who constantly seeks, according to Yeats, the mystical bodily annihilation of complete abstraction, seeks also to divest himself of the world and thus of the image, which is the poet's life. A creature of Phase 27 according to Yeats's cyclical system, "His joy is to be nothing, to do nothing, to think nothing; but to permit the total life, expressed in its humanity, to flow in upon him and to express itself through his acts and thoughts. He is not identical with it, he is not absorbed in it, for if he were he would not know that he is nothing, that he no longer even possesses his own body, that he must renounce even his desire for his own salvation and that this total life is in love with his nothingness." The poet must back away from this ideal, for approach to it gravely threatens his communicative forms. In the poem "Vacillation," Yeats expresses the difference between himself and the mystical philosopher Von Hügel:

Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.

.....
So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings
on your head.

In a short dialogue poem, "The Saint and the Hunchback," the issue is put in a somewhat similar way. Though the Hunchback of Phase 26 does not represent the poet in Yeats's system, it is closer to the subjective phases than is the saint:

Saint: God tries each man
According to a different plan.
I shall not cease to bless because
I lay about me with the taws
That night and morning I may thrash

Greek Alexander from my flesh,
Augustus Caesar, and after these
That great rogue Alcibiades.

Hunchback: To all that in your flesh have stood
And blessed, I give my gratitude,
Honoured by all in their degrees,
But most to Alcibiades.

Beyond sainthood, between it and the ultimate supernatural in Yeats's system, is Phase 28, the phase of the fool, the last incarnation; again this is not the poet's phase: "At his worst his hands and feet and eyes, his will and his feelings, obey obscure subconscious fantasies, while at his best he would know all wisdom if he could know anything. The physical world suggests to his mind pictures and events that have no relation to his needs or even to his desires; his thoughts are an aimless reverie; his acts are aimless like his thoughts; and it is in this aimlessness that he finds his joy."

The poet cannot be the saint, much less the fool. This idea is stated by means of another figure in *The Cutting of an Agate*: "If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again. The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed, for that has no life for him; and if he did his style would become cold and monotonous, and his sense of beauty faint and sickly . . . but be content to find his pleasure in all that is for ever passing away that it may come again . . . in momentary heroic passion, in whatever is most fleeting, most impassioned, as it were, for its own perfection, most eager to return to its own glory." To return to my own metaphor, for Yeats the space, time, and numbers of poetry must seek perfection at neither mathematic nor material extreme, but somewhere between, where the abstracting impulse is always fused with experience. Nor may the poet be the saint, who seeks a freedom from the image ultimately more radical than that of mathematics.

ALLEN TATE'S USE OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE

Lillian Feder

I

"CONSCIOUSNESS OF HISTORY cannot be fully awake, except where there is other history than the history of the poet's own people: we need this in order to see our own place in history." T. S. Eliot regards this consciousness of history as one of the requirements of the mature poet, and he suggests Vergil as an example of the poet who exhibits this awareness of his relation not only to the past of his own nation but to the past of a civilization before his. Vergil himself has provided for Allen Tate a means of extending his view of history, and, as the "story of Aeneas" was for Vergil "a statement of relatedness between two great cultures,"¹ so it became for Tate a symbol of both the "relatedness" and the tragic separation between the past and the present.

Critics have written much on Tate's use of historical material,² but they have, for the most part, concentrated on one tradition—that of the old South. The influence of that "other history," the *publica materies*, the myths and literature of the ancient classical world, which helped to form Tate as a poet, has hardly been explored. Yet, to understand the poetry of Tate, it is necessary to study his "classicism," which manifests itself in his basic ideas and themes, his adaptation of

¹ T. S. Eliot, "What Is a Classic?", *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), pp. 62-63.

² See Willard Burdett Arnold, *The Social Ideas of Allen Tate* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1955); F. Cudworth Flint, "Five Poets," *Southern Review*, I (Winter, 1936), 650-674; Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "The Southern Quality," in Allen Tate, ed., *A Southern Vanguard* (New York, 1947), pp. 100-121; Delmore Schwartz "The Poetry of Allen Tate," *Southern Review*, 5 (Winter, 1940), 419-438.

ancient myths and history to poetic symbols, and his language and imagery.

In any discussion of classicism in contemporary literature, it is impossible to ignore the work of T. E. Hulme, whose ideas on the subject, though often inconsistent,³ were none the less extremely influential and have caused much confusion about the nature of classicism in modern poetry. Though Tate has declared himself a follower of Hulme,⁴ it can be shown that the direct influence of classical literature was far more important in Tate's development as a poet than were the ideas of Hulme, and that a sounder view of certain qualities of modern classicism can be derived from the observation of Tate's use of ancient literature than from Hulme's speculations on the classical point of view.

In defining classicism, Hulme is concerned with three main subjects: man, society, and poetry. According to Hulme, classicism presupposes limitation: the limitations of man's capacities, the limitations society must impose upon man, and the limitations style must impose upon a poet's conception. "Man," he says, "is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him." Classicism in poetry results from such an attitude toward man and society, and this attitude is revealed by what Hulme calls "the dry hardness which you get in the classics."⁵

Hulme's definition seems to be derived from his own prejudices about man rather than from the experience of classical literature. Only a very "limited" view of Homer,

³ For an interesting discussion of Hulme's inconsistencies, see Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

⁴ In Allen Tate, "The Present Function of Criticism," *Reason in Madness* (New York, 1941), p. 4. See also his "Religion and the Old South," *On the Limits of Poetry* (New York, 1948), p. 308.

⁵ T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in Robert Wooster Stallman, ed., *Critiques and Essays in Criticism* (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), pp. 4-9.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Vergil could suggest that their conception of man is so narrow. True, "limitation" has come to be one of the favorite clichés substituted for a definition in handbooks on the subject, and there is some justification for its use. The word undefined or incorrectly interpreted, however, is merely misleading.

The ancient poets and dramatists do deal both explicitly and indirectly with man's limitations, but in their work this theme is not oversimplified; it is almost always combined with two other themes which are equally important in any consideration of classicism. According to the classical view, it is not because his nature is constant that man is limited; on the contrary, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and other ancient poets and dramatists offer much evidence of the way in which man can and does change. Man is limited because, tragically, he cannot realize in fact the magnitude and quality of his visions. Moreover, he is warned about his limitations so that he may keep a sense of perspective. In war he must be mindful of the larger world of which war is only a part, as the engravings on the shield of Achilles remind us; at his heights he must be aware of possible defeats. But no other literature has ever depicted man so exalted in defeat, so capable of exceeding through the extent of his vision and his enlightenment the fact of his limitations.

Thus, limitation in classical literature is tragic, a view which invariably produces eloquence rather than "dry hardness." The conciseness and orderliness of the form of an ode or of a *kommós* in Greek tragedy is often in apparent contrast with the violent disorder of the feelings thus expressed, but is this contrast not a means of revealing the essential conflict in man's nature which the ancient classics elucidate? The acceptance of limitation in classical poetry and drama implies no petty bargain with destiny: we are aware that Achilles and Aeneas perform the *virtutis opus*, accepting the inevitable condition that theirs is a limited means of finding

fulfillment; for Oedipus, wisdom and finally glorification as a sacred figure accompany the acceptance of limitation.

All this should be perfectly clear to anyone who knows classical literature, but unfortunately Hulme and his disciples seem to ignore the evidence of classical or even much of neo-classical literature when they use the adjective critically. As Kathleen Nott points out: "Both Classicism and Romanticism, as applied by the neo-scholastics to poetry, are false and arbitrary abstractions."⁶

Yet an authentic classical influence is apparent in contemporary literature. The real spirit of classicism is to be found in contemporary poetry rather than in criticism, which sometimes seems to negate the practice of the very poets who write it. With more insight into this subject than Hulme, Wallace Fowlie says: "Modern poetry will one day be described as the vindication of the profoundest principle of classicism where the most universal problems of life are transcribed in a style of language that has reached a high degree of enchantment."⁷ The classical influence reflected in the work of many contemporary poets manifests itself in (1) a tendency to relate a specific problem of their age to the general metaphysical problems of man's relation to time, history, and the universe; (2) a "tragic sense of life," the acceptance of the double nature of enlightenment—at once the price and the reward of man's struggles with his limitations; (3) a dramatic rather than a decorative use of myth and of allusions to legendary and historical figures of the ancient world; (4) conciseness and exactness of language, conveying a tension between the order of strict form and the violence of the emotions expressed. It is these qualities of Tate's poetry which mainly concern us here: his treatment of contemporary problems against the background of universal

⁶ Kathleen Nott, *The Emperor's Clothes* (London: Heinemann, 1953), p. 234.

⁷ Wallace Fowlie, ed., *Mid-Century French Poets* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 17.

ones, and the power of his language, which at once recalls and revitalizes ancient myths, symbols, and images.

II

In both *The Mediterranean* and *Aeneas at Washington* Tate deals with the problem of modern man's loss of a tradition, and in both poems the Vergilian world provides an ideal against which Tate measures the present. The ancient world is not simply a means of showing up the shortcomings of the present, however; it is also an image of the potential if unrealized nobility inherent in modern man, who denies his own heritage and thus his own power.

The epigraph to *The Mediterranean*, *Quem das finem, rex magne, dolorum?* in which Tate substitutes the word *dolor* for Vergil's word *labor* (*Aeneid* I, 241), suggests both Tate's ironic method and the theme of the poem. When Aeneas prays for an end to his *laborum*, he is asking for respite from the suffering involved in completing the heroic task of founding the Roman nation, which exacts a price of pain but offers the reward of self-fulfillment. Modern man, however, deprived of a heroic goal, a *virtutis opus*, can only cry out for an end to his *dolorum*, his grief or mental anguish. The difference, of course, lies not only in the quality of ancient and modern men, but in the societies in which they live.

Tate uses the classical past in his poetry to represent a unified society in which man's behavior is directed by a heroic code of conduct. Aeneas in *The Mediterranean* and *Aeneas at Washington* is Tate's conception of the traditional man, inspired by his attachment to his nation and his people; he can live by a heroic code of conduct and perform a heroic task because he is able to forego personal satisfaction for the larger pursuit of a national goal.

In *The Mediterranean* we, modern men, sail on a pilgrimage through the very seas on which Aeneas struggled to achieve his heroic mission. Tate's language here echoes

Vergil's: "long bay" is a literal translation of *secessu longo* and "towering stone"⁸ calls to mind *vastae rupes* (I, 159-62). The phrases help to recall Aeneas' journey, but more important, they imply that modern man attempts to relive Aeneas' experience.

The first three stanzas begin with the words, "Where we went," and the next two with the word "Where." In this way Tate suggests the compulsive repetition of our quest. Like Aeneas and his men, we wander and search. As the travellers reach shore, the real meaning of the quest becomes clear. The desperation of their need is contained in the most important image of the poem, the image of feasting. Tate evokes the ancient ritual to suggest modern despair and frustration. For Aeneas the eating of the plates was a casual act symbolic of the great deeds to be performed; for us it is a desperate, secret need.

We, "hastening to drink all night/ Eat dish and bowl to take that sweet land in!" We try through imitation of an ancient ritual to re-create the world in which it was possible to live heroically. The dramatic urgency of these lines conveys the need of modern man for a noble goal, but at the same time the futility of his quest is implied by Tate's adaptation of the myth to image. Aeneas did not attain the destined land because he ate the plates; this act was merely a sign of his accomplishment. We seek the magic of the sign, of the ceremony, of the legends the past has left us, for we have no goal of our own beyond that of personal gratification. Therefore, we devour dish and bowl only to ask: "What prophecy of eaten plates could landless/ Wanderers fulfill by the ancient sea?" We merely "taste the famous age," but we cannot participate in its spirit, and so we cannot fulfill ourselves.

Aeneas at Washington contains the same theme. Here

⁸ All quotations from Tate's poetry are taken from *Poems, 1922-1947* (New York, 1948).

Aeneas is both the legendary figure of the ancient past and modern man yearning for the heroic destiny which this heritage seemed to promise him. The first four lines of the poem, taken from Aeneas' account of the Trojan disaster, are a literal translation of *Aeneid* II, 499-502. Tate apparently feels that these lines contain the essence of the tragedy of Troy, Priam's fate representing the destruction of the majesty and power of Troy; Neoptolemus, the savagery of the destroyer. The passage describes the suffering which Aeneas has witnessed and endured, and presents Aeneas as Vergil depicted him at a crucial point in his life.

Tate then goes on to give his own view of what followed these events. His interpretation of Aeneas' conduct and his description of Aeneas as part of a modern American scene suggest what happens to the heroic figure alive today, the heroic nature of man in today's world, and the heroic heritage of modern man in modern society.

Tate's interpretation of Aeneas' conduct and deeds begins at line 5:

In that extremity I bore me well,
A true gentleman, valorous in arms,
Disinterested and honorable.

Much of what Tate says in these lines sums up the traditional view of Aeneas. The word "disinterested," however, offers a new view of his conduct, and I think is significant for what it tells us not only about Aeneas but about Tate's conception of heroism. Aeneas, as Vergil depicts him, is "disinterested" because he is concerned with the task at hand, not with his personal safety. He can act "objectively" in that "extremity"; he sees what must be done, and even in retreat he acts nobly. In other words, Aeneas is not hampered by inability "to function objectively in nature and society."⁹ He is not the victim of what Tate calls "solipsism," a theme he discusses in

⁹ Allen Tate, "Narcissus as Narcissus," *On the Limits of Poetry*, pp. 250-251.

Narcissus as Narcissus and develops fully in the *Ode to the Confederate Dead*, but which cannot be ignored in this poem.

In *Narcissus as Narcissus* Tate says that "solipsism" is "a philosophical doctrine which says that we create the world in the act of perceiving it." It "denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society. Society (and 'nature' as modern society constructs it) appears to offer limited fields for the exercise of the whole man, who wastes his energy piecemeal over separate functions that ought to come under a unity of being."

Aeneas can be "valorous" and "disinterested" and thus a "true gentleman" because he is a member of a society which lives by a heroic code. Even at the moment when he witnesses the destruction of that society, he is able to function as a "whole man," that is, to set forth to found a new land.

The four lines of the second section of the poem create a brilliant transition, for they describe both aspects of Aeneas: the hero of the *Aeneid* and the man he has become, now "at Washington," faced with the problems of modern man.

(To the reduction of uncitied littorals
We brought chiefly the vigor of prophecy,
Our hunger breeding calculation
And fixed triumphs)

Both the founders of Rome and of America brought to the "reduction" or conquest of the land "the vigor of prophecy." Tate's use of the Latinism "littorals" recalls, of course, the landing of Aeneas on the *litora* or shore of Italy, but it also suggests that to the settlers of America the country was not merely a shore on which to land but one which contained all the promise of the *litora Italiae*. It implies that they came with a sense of dedication which their tradition, their knowledge of and belief in the ancients, had taught them. But for both the Romans and the Americans, "hunger [,] breeding calculation," limited their "triumphs" to materialistic ones.

"Hunger," the very image which Tate forms out of the Vergilian myth of eating the plates, to symbolize the desire for a prophetic vision, is used here ironically to imply the need for material fulfillment.

Thus Tate prepares us for the third section in which Aeneas, mindful of his own history, is shocked by the contrast between the promise of the past and the actuality of the present. Now, he "see[s] all things apart" because, no longer a member of a "traditional society," a society "that permitted [men] to develop a human character that functioned in every level of life,"¹⁰ his personal desires have little to do with his nation's needs.

The singular passion
Abides its object and consumes desire
In the circling shadow of its appetite.

A modern man, he has been affected by "solipsism." He "wastes his energy piecemeal over separate functions that ought to come under a unity of being." The advantage of Aeneas as a symbol here is that Aeneas' career represents history as man once saw history; he symbolizes our tradition and the resources of man as a heroic figure. Aeneas, looking back nostalgically to his own glorious past and questioning the meaning of Troy, symbolizes the tragic nostalgia and conflict of modern man. Our tragedy is not that of a day or a period; it is given significance by its place in history, in time, as Tate sees it, for the past is present in our very defeats, and awareness of it gives us perspective. The remembrance intensifies the shame of our present weakness, but it also indicates our inherent strength. It warns us against self-destruction; its very living presence is proof that our lives need not be so narrow as we choose to make them. The memory of Troy and "what we had built her for," words which contain both tragic insight into the quality of the past and at the

¹⁰ Allen Tate, "What Is a Traditional Society?" *On the Limits of Poetry*, p. 297.

same time a plaintive question as to its meaning in the present, imply that we built Troy not only literally but figuratively or poetically out of our need for a heroic destiny and a meaningful way of life. After all, Troy even to the Romans was essentially a myth, and it can, Tate seems to say, serve us as it served them. It is the myth of our own past.

The *Ode to the Confederate Dead*, Tate says, is about "solipsism."¹¹ In the *Ode* Tate suggests, as he does in *The Mediterranean* and *Aeneas at Washington*, that the solipsism of modern man results from the fact that contemporary society denies him his traditional right to fulfillment through a heroic goal. This is the positive quality of the *Ode*. The dual themes of solipsism and the need for the *virtutis opus*, which are, of course, really one, are developed more fully and more deeply in the *Ode* than they are in the two poems discussed above, and again they are expressed through the imagery of the ancient world.

Tate remarks on the general form of the poem: it is an ode ". . . even further removed from Pindar than Abraham Cowley. I suppose in so calling it I intended an irony: the scene of the poem is not a public celebration, it is a lone man by a gate." Though Tate does not say so, he implies that the contrast between the personal quality of his ode and the public nature of the Pindaric expresses the solipsism of modern man. The man at the gate has the "secret need" of the wanderers on the Mediterranean, and like them he makes a lonely journey into the past. Obviously, Tate expects his readers to be aware of the nature of the traditional odes, the Pindarics, not of the specific details of their contents, but their tone, which always implies that the poet speaks to and for a society united in triumph. The Pindarics are not simply victory odes; they are poems in which a particular hero is regarded as the worthy bearer of a great tradition. Tate's

¹¹ All the critical comments quoted in connection with the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* are taken from Tate's essay, "Narcissus as Narcissus," *On the Limits of Poetry*, pp. 248-262.

adaptation of the ode form implies that if modern man is trapped by his personal conception of the world, so is the very character of the ode transformed by this view. The lone man speaks for himself, and, if what he says represents the thoughts of others, it is their defeat which he expresses, for they, like him, are cut off from the heroic past and the actual present.

This defeat is expressed most intensely in the leaf image, which Tate uses not only in the refrain but in the first and last strophes. The image is an extremely interesting and important one. In the first strophe Tate says of the leaves: "They sough the rumors of mortality." The leaves, "of nature the casual sacrament / To the seasonal eternity of death," remind man of his own mortality. "Autumn and the leaves are death," says Tate in *Narcissus as Narcissus*. The leaf image replies with finality to the cry for an "active faith," which constitutes the second theme of the poem.

There is a striking similarity between Tate's and Homer's use of the leaf image. Homer's passage containing this image is perhaps one of the best known in the *Iliad*. Diomedes and Glaucus meet on the battlefield, and Diomedes asks Glaucus who he is. Glaucus replies:

Great-souled son of Tydeus, why do you ask about my lineage?
Just as the generation of leaves, so is that also of men. The
wind scatters the leaves upon the earth, but the forest as it
flourishes, puts forth others when spring comes. So one genera-
tion of men springs up while another passes away. However,
if you want to, you may know my lineage. There are many
who do know it. (VI, 145-51)

In this passage the contrast between man's struggle to live heroically, between his justified pride in his past and present achievements and his tragic destiny is clearly set forth. Man is like a leaf but he is also man. The agony of his tragic end is all the more terrible because, unlike a leaf, he struggles to perform heroic deeds, yet like a leaf he passes away to extinc-

tion. The very points at which the simile is inadequate contain its greatest emotional force.

In Homer the leaf image provides a commentary on the constant feats of heroism which his heroes demand of themselves and which it is assumed they owe their society. "Be a man," says one warrior to another. In other words, act nobly; perform the heroic deeds which offer man his one chance of redemption, his chance to snatch from life a glory which defines it. That the very act which may destroy a man is what offers him a measure of release from his doom is the tragedy of human life.

Tate's repeated references to the leaves in the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* recall the leaf image in the *Iliad*. In the *Ode* the image of the leaves provides the answering strain to the quest for heroism in history, in man himself, and vainly, in society. Like the *Iliad*, the *Ode* is "a certain section of history made into experience." Tate uses history both literally and imaginatively, fusing with ease the recent American past with antiquity. Before discussing the leaf image in the *Ode*, it is necessary to observe how Tate develops "the theme of heroism," which he himself says is the second theme of the poem.

III

Tate says that the strophe beginning "You know who have waited by the wall" contains "the other terms of the conflict. It is the theme of heroism, not merely moral heroism but heroism in the grand style, elevating even death from mere physical dissolution into a formal ritual: this heroism is a formal ebullience of the human spirit in an entire society, not private, romantic illusion—something better than moral heroism, great as that may be, for moral heroism, being personal and individual, may be achieved by certain men in all ages, even ages of decadence." He goes on to quote Hart Crane's definition: "the theme of chivalry . . . active faith."

He describes an ideal way of life based upon conduct, and the heroic code of conduct he speaks of is that clearly defined in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the code which could make Aeneas "disinterested," which makes Glaucus, even after he has expressed the tragic irony of man's doom, go on to tell his enemy of his ancestors, prepared to fight as bravely as they did and as nobly as the code of his society demands that he fight and live. Both his desire to fight Diomedes and his subsequent acceptance of his friendship are motivated not by personal whim but by the code of his society.

Tate tells us that the passage in the *Ode* beginning "You know who have waited by the wall" is "meant to convey a plenary vision, the actual presence of, the exemplars of an active faith." This plenary vision appears in two main symbols: the warrior and the ancient philosophers, Zeno and Parmenides. The warrior is the traditional symbol of heroism. Though Tate concretizes his warrior through his list of names connected with the Civil War, he does not limit him to this particular time, for he is the warrior whose heroism results from a view of the world represented by the philosophical system of Parmenides and Zeno. His warrior is once again the man who lives by a heroic code of conduct. "Muted Zeno and Parmenides" represent the world view which makes such a code possible.

Of those who have the heroic vision, Tate says:

You know the rage,
The cold pool left by the mounting flood,
Of muted Zeno and Parmenides.

Parmenides and his disciple, Zeno, were the first to separate existence into being and becoming. Theirs is a philosophical system which makes a distinction between the objective and unchanging world of being and the subjective world of becoming. Parmenides (in *Frag. VI*) warns against the "way of seeming" (the state of solipsism, Tate would say). He warns against the subjective blindness of mere dependence on the

senses for knowledge of the world. Thus, Parmenides and Zeno represent for Tate an objective, "whole" view of life. Moreover, Zeno, not only in his thought but also in his conduct, exemplifies the heroic way of life. According to tradition, when captured by the tyrant he was opposing, he bit off his tongue rather than give the information demanded by his enemy. "Muted Zeno," therefore, has a double meaning: Zeno made mute by his own act of heroism and Zeno, the heir and exponent of a philosophical system which regards the universe as whole and knowledge as objective, muted in what Tate calls the "fragmentary cosmos of today."

The heroic vision, as Tate presents it poetically, is composed of heroic action based on a view of the world which is objective, whole, and unchanging. Moreover, it is a vision created out of the ancient past combined with the recent one. It is a vision which suggests a continuity in human thought, conduct, and feeling, broken only in the world of today.

"In contemplating the heroic theme," says Tate, "the man at the gate never commits himself to the illusion of its availability to him. The most that he can allow himself is the fancy that the blowing leaves are charging soldiers, but he rigorously returns to the refrain: 'Only the wind'—or the 'leaves flying.'" The wind-leaf refrain provides the answering strain. The lone man, striving to be one with those who waited by the wall, tries even to transform the leaves into fighting men. But, as in Homer, we are struck by the dissimilarity. In the *Iliad* the simple quality of the leaf is contrasted with the complex and tragic nature of man, doomed to the same end. In Tate's poem man's inability to transform the leaf into a symbol of heroism suggests that the certainty of man's tragic fate overpowers any thought of his potential heroism. The man at the gate cannot identify himself with the leaves "as Keats and Shelley too easily and too beautifully did with nightingales and west winds." The leaf is a symbol of his mortality and his aloneness.

In both Homer and Tate, the leaf image, with its implications of death, is combined and contrasted with a scene of heroism in warfare. In Homer, Glaucus, even as he sees these implications, suggests by his very conduct that through heroism man can redeem himself if only partially and tragically. Tate, looking back on the history of his own nation with the traditionally epic view, finds that in the present there is not even the possibility of tragic redemption. Thus, his departure from Homer is as important as his echo of him, for the very contrast between the two poets' use of the leaf image suggests the theme of Tate's poem.

Tate's last use of a classical allusion in the *Ode* is an entirely ironical one. The jaguar, he tells us, is substituted for Narcissus. Of course, Narcissus by his very absence is immensely important. Replaced by the jaguar, the destructive and self-devouring elements of the Narcissus figure are made explicit. As the "jaguar leaps" we see the lovely boy Narcissus for what he really is. In giving solipsism this concrete form, Tate reveals its ugliness and brutality, and he adds a dimension to the myth he adapts.

Ode to the Confederate Dead cannot be understood without the framework of the classical world. Here, as in *The Mediterranean* and *Aeneas at Washington*, Tate speaks of the present only in relation to the past, and his view of the past is the epic view, heroic, exalted, the poet's past rather than the historian's.

IV

Though Tate is not always as dependent on the classical past as he is in the three poems just discussed, he none the less uses references to classical literature consistently to point up through a heroic or tragic association the significance of a contemporary event or problem. A striking example is his incorporation of the well-known epitaph by Simonides into the monologue of an old soldier reminiscing on the Civil

War. In calling his poem *To the Lacedemonians*, Tate suggests at once that the old soldier belongs to the heroic tradition; the past he recalls is part of the epic past of ancient history and legend. Moreover, the old soldier addresses not us but the Lacedemonians. We overhear the remarks. He excludes us not out of snobbery but out of his sad realization that the only ones who can understand him are those who lived by a heroic code. The title implies his loneliness and isolation, and our inadequacy as an audience. However, the poem, though addressed to the Lacedemonians, is of course written for us; to the extent that we comprehend the remarks we overhear we participate in the spirit of those who understood the language of heroes.

The old soldier's visit to the past is another secret pilgrimage: "I am here with a secret in the night," he says. Comparing the "elegance" of the past with the "luxury" of the present, he wonders why the men of the present generation are without tradition or imagination. "Where have they come from?" he asks. Then, he goes on to echo Simonides' epitaph for the heroes of Thermopylae:

Go you tell them
That we their servants, well-trained, gray-coated
And haired (both foot and horse) or in
The grave, them obey . . . obey them,
What commands?

The old man's adaptation of the epitaph implies that he lived and fought by the heroic code of the Spartans. But that is only one of its meanings. He regards himself not only as the "servant" of a literal leader, but also as the "servant" of a tradition. Not only he but the dead ("or in/ the grave") serve that tradition. The words "them obey . . . obey them" seem to express the faltering thoughts of an old man, and, since the Greek word order is *τοῖς χείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι* (of them the words obeying), his faltering seems to imply his struggle to remember the original words and thus their

original meaning, for he goes on to ask tragically, "What commands?" He is questioning himself, the experiences of his youth, and finally the ancient past, which clarifies the meaning of his own history.

Imagery drawn from classical literature almost always provides the answering strain in Tate's poetry to a modern oversimplification of a problem, to vulgarity and triviality. "Antiquity breached mortality with myths," he says in *Retroduction to American History*. In that poem he exposes the vulgar misuse of the classical past in modern America:

Narcissus is vocabulary. Hermes decorates
A cornice on the Third National Bank. Vocabulary
Becomes confusion, decoration a blight; the Parthenon
In Tennessee stucco, art for the sake of death.

Such vulgarization of the classical past is a way of avoiding its meaning. It is the "practical" man's means of dismissing the intricacy and tragedy of experience recorded in ancient myth, while retaining a cheap version of it to satisfy his vanity. It is myth used decoratively rather than emotionally or dramatically.

In several poems Tate evokes the vitality of ancient myth to argue against materialism and the naturalistic view of life. In his very use of myth as image lies his whole argument. "False Nightmare" is an attack on Whitmanism, on Whitman's naturalism and individualism in his approach to man and his land. Whitmanism to Tate is arrogance:

My five and ten cent shelf
The continent is: my targe
Bigger than Greece.

Tate's reply is contained in the image of Europa and the bull:

In bulled Europa's morn
We love our land because
All night we raped her torn . . .

The paradox of man's love for his land and his violence toward it, his identification with it, his self-realization in relation to it, his manhood achieved in terms of it; all the complexity of Tate's approach to his land as contrasted with the self-conscious primitivism of Whitman's attitude is expressed in this image. In using the image Tate seems to insist on the vitality of the past. The myths of the past which Whitman repudiates provide the answer to his argument.

"Unnatural Love" deals again with the problem of naturalism, and again Tate's answer is expressed through a classical image. He addresses the poem to Landor, the last of the neo-classicists. His tone at the beginning of the poem is faintly ironic, the tone of a man made wise by experience in a disordered world addressing an innocent, a neo-classicist who is unaware that he lives in a society in which naturalism has already separated art and nature. Both art and nature "served" Landor "sweetly"; however,

From us I see them part
After they served, so sweetly, you—
Yet nature has no heart:
Brother and sister are estranged
By his ambitious lies
For he his sister Helen much deranged—
Outraged her, and put coppers on her eyes.

The image of Helen, though it appears at the end, dominates the whole poem. Through this image Tate creates a dramatic shift in tone; furthermore, it contains his theme. From rather light sarcasm in his address to Landor, Tate shifts to bitter, even tragic irony. And it is the image of Helen with all its ancient associations, outraged by nature, or really the naturalistic view of life ("‘nature’ as modern society constructs it"), which creates this tone. For such a view of life denies the "heart," the feelings; its exponents are preoccupied only with their arrogant attempts to account for the complexity and mystery of human life through their

"ambitious lies." Helen is not simply a static representation of art: her name evokes her history, her power, but more important, the power of the poet who created her and of all the poets who kept her alive. Now nature, having killed her, puts "coppers on her eyes" to make certain that the eyes of beauty, potent so long, may not though dead assert their power.

The Eye, which is concerned with the same theme, deals with the effect of naturalism on man rather than on art. The poem begins with an epigraph from Callimachus: λαϊδρὴ κορώνη, κῶς τὸ χεῖλος οὐκ ἀλγεῖς. It is taken from the *Iambi* (1.278), one episode of which tells the story of the quarrel between the laurel and the olive, each of which is trying to prove her superiority. The olive concludes her recitation of her own virtues by repeating the flattering remarks of the birds, for these provide more evidence of her superiority. She then interrupts her report and addresses the birds in two parenthetical lines. In the first, she speaks to all the birds, calling them "unwearied chatterers." Though she enjoys their flattery, she feels obliged to scold them for their excessive praise. In the second line, she turns to the crow, and asks, apparently with self-conscious modesty, "shameless crow, how is it that your lip does not hurt you?"¹² which is the line Tate quotes.

The poem is a complicated one. With a series of adjectives generally associated with physical matter, Tate describes the "eye" of "mineral man." His way of looking at the world and his conception of life are determined by the limitations of his view, for his eye is "agate," "nuclear," "carbolic." Finally, there is "nothing in the eye." For this "natural man" the sky is "sphereless." He is a man who takes the "fatherless dark" to bed and the "acid sky to the brain-pan"; having excluded

¹² Rudolphus Pfeiffer, ed., *Callimachus* (Oxonii, 1949), note to *Iambus* IV, fr. 194, 1.182sq. "duo versus, in parenthesi, in memoriam revocant non olivam ipsam sed aves loqui."

the mystery of the past and the realm of the imagination from his life, he "calls the crows to peck his head." Obviously, the last line of the poem is related to the epigraph. Modern man, the victim of his own scientific naturalism, calls the flatterers to offer him the only vision he can now seek—the vision of his own self-importance. The rather naive remark of Callimachus' olive is thus given a new meaning through the shift in point of view: as the original protagonist's commentary it is a disarming remark; as the poet's recollection in a new context it assumes bitterness. The word "peck" reveals the true meaning of this flattery, its compulsive and destructive nature.

An important theme in Tate's prose and poetry is that the naturalistic or pragmatic approach to life reflects modern man's unwillingness to face the problem of evil in the world. In VIII of "Sonnets of the Blood," Tate, in demanding that modern man accept the presence of evil and the necessity of dealing with it, revokes the Oedipus of Sophocles' play, who is both defeated and triumphant. Oedipus' recognition of his terrible deeds and his enlightenment are both the price and the reward of his tragic stature. Oedipus has been willing to pay the enormous cost in suffering for self-knowledge, but his victory over inner-blindness is as much a triumph as his physical blindness is a sign of defeat. Oedipus' experience has taught him more than the moral lesson the chorus recites; he has solved the riddle of himself.

Tate's use of Oedipus as a poetic symbol suggests this complicated and tragic figure. In VIII of "Sonnets of the Blood" Tate considers the question of what will "keep us whole in our dissevering air," the foul atmosphere which permeates a society of dissociated experience. And his answer is expressed through ancient myth:

Call it the house of Atreus where we live—
Which one of us the Greek perplexed with crime
Questions the future: bring that lucid sieve

To strain the appointed particles of time!
 Whether by Corinth or by Thebes we go
 The way is brief, but the fixed doom, not so.

Again the Greeks provide an example of fitting conduct. Tate begins with "the house of Atreus," which represents the overpowering evil of our society, corrupting all who come in contact with it. Then he shifts to the myth of Oedipus, who left Corinth to escape his destiny only to meet it at Thebes.

Since crime or evil exists, Tate asks, which one of us dares to face it with the courage of Oedipus? To overcome our confusion and apathy, we need the "lucid sieve" with which the ancient Greek could "strain the appointed particles of time." With ethical and intellectual courage he analyzed his "appointed" or fated experience. In the face of a "fixed" destiny, he exercised control over even irrational evil, for he dared to probe its meaning with reason and insight, and thus he imposed order through knowledge. Which one of us dares to question the future in terms of the past, as Oedipus did, and to pay the price of self-knowledge?

Clearly, the world of the classical past provides for Tate one essential means of expression and for the reader one important key to his basic themes and methods as a poet. One does not need to label Tate a neo-classicist because he imitates the Horatian epode or the eclogue form or because he constantly employs imagery taken from ancient myth; yet it is a mistake to ignore or to underestimate the importance of the classical tradition in his poetry.

V

Critics have discussed this strain in Tate's poetry but have failed to deal adequately with it. Vivienne Koch¹³ has attempted to show "that Tate is a poet of romantic sensibility

¹³ Vivienne Koch, "The Poetry of Allen Tate," in John Crowe Ransom, ed., *The Kenyon Critics* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 169-181.

who has tried with varying success to compress his talents into a chastely classical form and that, in inverse degrees to his willingness to do so, his best poetry has been written." She regards Tate's translation of the *Pervigilium Veneris* as his "valedictory, from a safe distance, to the Fugitives, to the South, to the 'classical' tradition, to his masters. The quickest way to get over the goodbyes is to say them in a strange language." One may ask, what strange language? The language of Tate's translation of the *Pervigilium* is more "classical" than that of the original poem. It is cryptic and economical, as elegantly colloquial as Horace's, and full of incredibly graceful Latinisms. It is well known that the *Pervigilium Veneris* has many Romantic elements. However, that Tate chose to translate this poem proves nothing about his attitude toward classical literature except that his interest in it is broad and varied. It is illogical to assume, as Miss Koch does, that Tate's translation of a late Latin poem which is outside the strictly classical type is a sign that he has lost his feeling for and response to classical literature as a source and an influence. Moreover, the facts are against such a point of view.

Miss Koch says that "in Tate's recent poetry the traditional influences (whether of structure, idea, or both) operate as qualities not as models." This judgment is no doubt correct if one recognizes the importance of such "qualities" in Tate's poetry. In her analysis of *Seasons of the Soul*, which in some respects is excellent, Miss Koch seems to underestimate or to ignore certain qualities which depend upon classical literature and which express some of Tate's most subtle and most significant ideas.

She remarks that Tate's phrase the "living wound of love" seems to have been suggested by Lucretius' *aeterno vulnere amoris*, and says: "I take the implication to be that Love, growing from a "livid" wound into the "living" wound is the only possible power which can rescue man from his other-

wise maimed existence. The passionate and suppliant address to Venus makes clear that she is the complex erotic symbol around which cluster the poet's hopes for various kinds of regeneration." She then goes on to show the relationship between Venus and the Mother of Silences, who is "a particular mother (St. Monica), the Virgin, the Mystery, and through Augustine's unmentioned wound she is identified further with the principle of Love. Love, then, is the luminous agency common to all the referents of the symbol. Yet, in the end, one feels that the hope of regeneration through Love is reluctantly abandoned and death is sought as the only certain 'kindness' to which men can aspire."

This reading is a fine one, but Miss Koch seems to ignore the relationship between Tate's imagistic use of Venus and other references to classical literature in the poem. The first occurs in the second stanza, in which Tate says that the soul must "seize or deny its day." This is not merely a variation and extension of the phrase *carpe diem*, but a significant application of its meaning and associations in a new context. The soul, says Tate, must have vitality and courage despite man's mortality. All the associations of the *carpe diem* theme repeated and developed in poetry from Alcaeus to Marvell are evoked through Tate's use of the phrase. It suggests the intensity and tragedy of man's struggle not only in our time but throughout time to wrest from life satisfaction and meaning. Tate's unique adaptation of it reveals the plight of man's soul in our time: it must struggle for and seize the place that has been denied it or give up entirely.

The ancients, Tate says in the fifth stanza, lived in an eternal summer, a world of "timeless day," a period when to "seize the day" implied an easy pleasure as compared with the anguish of the soul struggling to live in a world without belief. We have lost this peace, but it is a part of our past. We recall its spirit as part of our history, our own childhood.

The invocation to Venus is a cry to the spirit of creation

and love which we recall and inherit from the past. The image of Venus is contrasted with two images of futility and death which are taken from two ancient symbols: Plato's cave and Sisyphus' eternal frustration. Tate combines the two brilliantly:

It burns us each alone
Whose burning arrogance
Burns up the rolling stone
This earth—Platonic cave
Of vertiginous chance!
Come, tired Sisyphus,
Cover the cave's egress
Where light reveals the slave,
Who rests when sleeps with us
The mother of silences.

The earth is both the stone Sisyphus rolls without purpose and the cave in which the entrance of light reveals only human blindness and limitation. Death, for Tate, is not merely literal extinction, but life without goal or purpose. If man is to accept the role of Sisyphus, let him then complete his daily act of frustration by accepting death.

Though it is true that *Seasons of the Soul* is a tragic poem, it is not therefore a morbid one. Both Vivienne Koch and Richmond C. Beatty,¹⁴ whose interpretation of the poem is similar to hers, emphasize the mood of despair. Yet *Seasons of the Soul*, while it deals with suffering and loss of faith, also portrays the heroic contest man has always fought against the despair which has seemed overpowering. He has even descended into hell to find knowledge of love, the source of life:

Wilfully as I stood
Within the thickest grove
I seized a branch, which broke;
I heard the speaking blood
(From the livid wound of love)
Drip down upon my toe:

¹⁴ Richmond C. Beatty, "Allen Tate as Man of Letters," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 47 (April, 1948), 233-234.

"We are the men who died
Of self-inflicted woe,
Lovers whose stratagem
Led to their suicide."

Often in Tate's poetry his bitterest condemnations of man's conduct spring from his recognition of the contrast between man's heroic potentialities, his creative energies, and his "tragic fault,"¹⁵ his misuse of these qualities. The ancient symbols of Venus and Sisyphus represent the two ways man may take. Tate implies at the end of the poem that man may accept death, but his invocation to Venus is a moving and powerful affirmation of the potentialities of life.

According to Miss Koch, classicism was an inhibiting influence on Tate. On the contrary, Tate is never held back by his sources and models, but instead uses them freely for his own purposes and transforms them to his own conception. He is not a neo-classicist in the sense that he decorates with a classical flourish or repeats the old formulas, such as nothing too much or the simple life is best. He knows the classics too well. His classicism exists not in external, imitative manners, but in his way of thought and of feeling in poetry. His nostalgia is associated with the Homeric longing for heroism; in expressing his distress at contemporary values he gains both proportion and depth through a Vergilian image. Like the poets of classical antiquity, Tate employs traditional material to suggest the universality and continuity of his themes.

Regarding man's limitations, as did the ancient classicists, from the tragic point of view, Tate often emphasizes the tragic contest, out of which man can emerge with "knowledge carried to the heart," a reward of the very struggle which may reveal his inevitable limitations. This knowledge is expressed in Tate's poetry to a large extent through classical

¹⁵ Allen Tate, "Four American Poets," *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (New York, 1936), p. 8.

myth transformed into symbol. He often employs an ancient story—that of Aeneas or Oedipus—as a dramatic and concrete representation of traditional values or perennial conflict. The mythical story is sometimes told cryptically, implied more than stated, for Tate's language is classical in its precision, suggesting the tension produced by controlled feeling. In adapting the ancient myth of eating the plates to a modern metaphor, "Eat dish and bowl to take that sweet land in," Tate reveals our overwhelming need of a heritage to guide us, by suggesting hunger and violent consumption in a hopeless attempt to appease it; yet the concreteness and simplicity of his image control the intense feelings and give them form. The result is not "dry hardness," but emotion eloquent through restraint. The leaf as a symbol of mortality in the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* is not romanticized or sentimentalized, but, through the Homeric associations it evokes, suggests tragic experience in the past and the present. Classical literature served Tate by broadening his view; if it imposed limits on him, they were only those resulting from the creative process of emulation, a discipline through which the "individual talent" can often flourish.

A JAPANESE FRANC-TIREUR TALKS WITH GIDE AND MALRAUX

Kyo Komatsu

*Translated and Edited by Wesley R. Fishel and
Midori H. Scott*

I

ABOUT THE YEAR 1935, motivated by my active humanist feelings, I joined a movement which promoted such ideas as anti-fascism, the Popular Front, and the defense of culture in Japan. I had secretly planned to introduce to the world of Japanese journalism the same sort of movement which was being developed in France, and to make of it a living force. In that sense I could be said to have been one of the seed-sowers or igniters of the fire of the Popular Front in Japan.

I do not intend to dwell upon the movements of that time. However, it is a fact that but a few intellectuals put forth as much effort as was possible under the conditions of the era. The efforts of our small number were not sufficient to contend with the tide which carried Japan on its foaming surface.

There are two or three unpleasant situations which I still recall with clarity. One of these occurred within Japan itself. It was a fact that there were not a few people among the proletarian writers and Marxists who strongly opposed the comprehensive cooperation existing between the intelligentsia and the liberals who were taking an anti-fascist stand. Among these the worst example was one notorious writer who said openly that it would be impossible for proletarian writers to cooperate with petit bourgeois liberal writers, that it was impossible for one to put faith in liberal writers—yet after this little outburst the writer rapidly embraced fascism!

The second of these was the fact that the anti-fascist movement overseas looked slightly upon the cultural and political anti-fascist movement in Japan, or else ignored it altogether. The overseas anti-fascists neglected to help the anti-fascist movement which, using all possible tactics and taking advantage of all available contacts, was growing throughout Japan. Suppose that the movement within Japan was, because of government pressure, weak. That was all the more reason why there should have been assistance from outside. If only the overseas democratic powers and anti-fascist organizations had but stretched out a helping hand to the anti-fascist forces in Japan, we might have been able to build a movement of more substantial strength.

Now that I think of it, if the proletarian writers and Marxists of that time had not shut themselves up in the ivory tower of a doctrinaire logic for its own sake, had thrown aside their arrogance and narrowness, and had started working in a spirit of cooperation and tolerance to develop greater flexibility, fluidity, and breadth on the anti-fascist battlefield, then even without outside aid they could have fought more successfully against the militarists and the right-wingers. These proletarians and Marxists were removed from the actual battlefield because of their isolated stand and sectarian principles.

I must confess that I do not understand why those persons who belonged to the camp of world anti-fascism did not extend their help and encourage those who were of the same faith within Japan. Was it because they were ignorant of the situation in Japan at that time that they folded their arms? Or could it perhaps have been that they had already decided that all Japanese were fanatical, aggressive, and fond of war, and they therefore completely overlooked the anti-fascist movement in Japan? In any event, their position seemed to me indefensible. Could it be that we who fought against the raging forces of that period were so few in num-

ber that people overseas felt it unnecessary or not worthwhile to give us any help whatsoever? The more clearly the threat of fascism in Japan could be perceived, was it not then the duty of the international anti-fascist movement to strengthen resistance against it in Japan? Is it possible that they neglected to do so, those who fancied themselves to be men of good will, because they had prematurely stamped upon the backs of the Japanese the word "fascist"? Against this sort of complaint, what could the people answer? They treated as fascists those Japanese anti-fascists who were trying so hard to keep Japan from falling over the brink. They threw us all into the same bag, and I have from that period to now felt not a small degree of antipathy toward those overseas anti-fascists.

Even in 1935, when the International Writers Conference for the Defense of Culture opened in Paris, not a single invitation, not a single report came to Japan. At this conference, in spite of the fact that representatives came from Germany, from Spain, and from China, Japan was as though erased from the cultural map of the world. Yet, despite this indifference, when the conference closed about the end of June in 1935, and for a short while thereafter, a number of newspapers and magazines in Japan did publish translations of the reports and speeches at this meeting. They used considerable space to make clear the importance of the meeting, and at the same time there were quite a few Japanese magazines which openly supported this international movement. In October of that year, I published the reports of the conference in a book entitled *The Defense of Culture*. This book began with André Gide's "Defense of Culture." It is ironic that it was probably in Japan alone that the papers of that conference appeared in book form. Even in France, where the meeting was held, and in the Soviet Union, which supported and encouraged the meeting, the reports were never published in this form, and I should add that this book was greeted by the intelligentsia and the younger generation in Japan with

tremendous enthusiasm and earnestness. I still have in my possession many cards from readers which indicate how great a response this book awakened. In all of my years as a writer I have never received so many letters from readers which were so filled with deep feeling and sympathetic understanding. . . .

The trend toward Fascism in Japan became more evident as time went on. The year following the Paris meeting we had the February 26 Incident in Japan, caused by a number of young army officers. That same summer came the Franco uprising in Spain. Historical occurrences all have a tendency to be related to one another. From 1937 on, the Spanish Civil War became increasingly violent, while the relations between China and Japan daily grew more tense. I was put under surveillance and felt myself to be in danger. I could perceive suppression in the offing. I was dead set against being imprisoned (this had happened to some of my friends). I did not want to lose my freedom, and I made up my mind that I would try to preserve my liberty as long as possible and resist fascism as best I could. There was no need to stay in Japan in order to fight fascism. As a matter of fact, if I were to be effective, I reasoned, I might well travel to some foreign land, say to Spain, or perhaps to France. I began to think that what was important was that I be in a place where my abilities could best be used.

My friend, André Malraux, as soon as the Franco army rose, jumped on a plane and flew at once to Madrid. After that, did he not become one of the people responsible for the International Volunteer Corps and fight at their side? Whenever I thought of that, something rose within my breast that lent fire to my ardor. How could I possibly go on living in this cramped Nippon, living in such an obscure and desperate fashion as this? Furthermore, the anti-fascist movement in Japan was becoming noticeably weaker with each passing day, and despair for its future began to take root in my heart. As

leaves being blown off a tree by the wind, my comrades of yesterday became scattered. Each time pressures and threats were applied from without, the ties which held these people together tore here and there, and finally we began to see our last resistance resting within our individual wills. How much fight could I put up in a Japan like this? I felt an urgent need to fight where it would be most worth the struggle and where I could use my abilities to their maximum. And this made my desire to journey to Spain even greater. . . .

It was about that time that there came into my hands, one after another, publications which contained reports from writers of various countries who reported on the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, and manifestoes by these writers making clear their stand on the issue. Some of these had appeared in French newspapers and magazines. Others I got from foreigners living in Japan. I wrote an article in support of the Madrid Government which was published in several Japanese newspapers. The Ambassador from the Spanish Republic who was then in Japan came all the way to my home to thank me for my article and brought with him material pertaining to the Civil War in Spain. My brother-in-law, an Indian who had married my youngest sister, sent me all the way from Kobe a Spanish magazine which contained the message from Romain Rolland. I wanted to get all of these materials together before I left and have them published in some outstanding magazine. I wanted to leave this as the last proof of my resistance to Japanese fascism, as well as the forewarning of my fight against fascism in Spain. Under the circumstances, I felt this would not endanger my passport and my departure.

After leaving Tokyo and just before I went to Kobe, where I was to board ship, the June 1937 issue of the *Chuo Koron* came out under my editorship. It was entitled "Spain in a Storm." In it I published Gide's "Words to the People of Spain," as well as "A Call to the Conscience of the World"

by Rolland. I also included "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," the report of Ilya Ehrenburg, Tristan Tzara's "Along the Outpost of Freedom," and André Malraux' "Forging Man's Fate in Spain." As translating editor I wrote as follows in the introduction: "This report is not simply the narrative of the actual experience of writers in a Spain which makes one think of Dante's *Inferno*. It is more. It is the urgent 'sign of conscience' of the intelligentsia who feel a duty and love toward people and toward culture. There is something here which is deeply moving."

When "Spain in a Storm" was published in the *Chuo Koron*, there were sections which were blue-pencilled before it went into print. This can be understood in view of the conditions prevailing at that time, for it was early in 1937, and the Sino-Japanese Incident was to begin at the Marco Polo Bridge on July 7 of that year. However, I was able to get the blazing sentences of Gide and Rolland and Malraux into print without their being censored. It is stirring to recall that there was still available in Japan the small degree of freedom which made these manifestoes publishable. What a pity that there was not enough decision and courage amongst our intellectuals to preserve this vestige of liberty. . . .

It was now July 7, 1937. I was in the midst of my preparations to leave for Europe when the China incident broke out. It was clear that, should the incident develop as seemed likely, fascism in Japan would eliminate every resisting element in the country and would consolidate its control. I had to get out quickly! If I delayed any longer there was a good chance that my painfully secured passport might become invalid. Not only that, but there was no telling when the rounding up of the members of the Labor and Farmer Parties' Popular Front would find me in the clutches of the police. My ship was scheduled to leave Kobe in the middle of August, but I left Tokyo two weeks early and went into hiding in Kobe while awaiting its departure. Now the Chinese and

Japanese armies commenced battle in Shanghai. When I thought that Japan's fate was in the hands of these militarists and fascists, I was thrown into a dark abyss of melancholy. And because of this all the stronger did the light shine before me who was about to escape from this island prison.

"To Spain, to Spain." Although my body was still in Japan, my heart was already under the distant skies of Iberia. At least there I would find a war to the death to preserve the freedom and dignity of mankind. There was "the honored land of the human race" and "the land of hope." This was my belief.

Toward the end of August my wife and I (who were married a few months before) boarded a Japanese steamer and left Kobe. Without stopping at Shanghai we went straight to Hong Kong. In Shanghai the fighting was going full blast.

II

I came down with a cold the day I arrived in Paris. The fatigue that had accumulated from the tense days prior to my departure from Japan, and the strain of the long ocean voyage, finally hit me, and as a result I spent my first week in Paris in bed with a fever.

When I regained normal health I went at once to the Japanese Embassy to pick up correspondence from home. On my return I walked down the Boulevard St. Germain. As I came closer to the offices of the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, I felt a wave of nostalgia for my friends of the magazine and unconsciously quickened my steps. It occurred to me that having come this far, I might as well stop in and see Jean Paulhan, the editor-in-chief; it might be that he could give me André Malraux' new address.

I had gone past five or six houses on the narrow street which wound toward the Seine and was coming abreast of the subway station when suddenly a lanky figure came into view, walking toward me. Could it be Malraux? The man was tall

and slim, his blond hair combed casually. He was talking agitatedly with a male companion. A nervous twitch on his face, his impassioned manner of bending his head forward while gesticulating with his hands made me certain that this was indeed André Malraux. He was now two houses distant. Once again I stared hard. Yes, it was Malraux himself!

This was the manner in which I saw Malraux the first day I spent out of my quarters in Paris. The following day I visited him at the appointed hour. It was eventide and we went together to a bar on St. Germain-des-Prés where we sat on the terrace and talked until eight in the evening. It was a reunion after six years of separation. We discoursed on one topic after another. I had the feeling that electrons of ideas were striving feverishly to jam themselves into my head. The intensity of Malraux' thinking was clearly reflected in everything he did. He had changed hardly at all since we parted at Yokohama in October of 1931. There was the same ever-vigilant spirit. His chin rested in his right hand. His eyes were half-closed, but his glance was truly as sharp as a sabre.

That night I told him of my ardent desire to go to Spain. I told him of my reasons for escaping from Japan, how large a part the anti-fascist struggle in Spain had played in my decision. I have before me now the conversation as I recorded it at that time in my diary:

"Frankly, there is a matter in which I need your help."
(This was the way in which I broached the subject.)

"And that is?"

"I want to go to Spain, and by that I mean that I want to go to your side of Spain."

There was not the slightest trace of surprise on his face. It seemed almost as if he had expected my words.

"Hm." He drew in his chin. And then, supporting his cheek with one hand, he blew cigarette smoke into the air.

"It'll be okay. Come over, then." Malraux' answer was simple, as though he were merely inviting me to dinner.

"How do I manage this?"

"Let me talk to José Bergamin. Bergamin happens to be the leading Spanish poet of our day and is now the Cultural Attaché at the Spanish Embassy in Paris. When you have secured a visa, there'll be nothing to it. We can fly together to Barcelona or Madrid."

"Thanks. I'll be counting on you then."

"It's a simple matter."

"This has been my objective since I left Japan."

The cup of absinthe was drained to the bottom. Malraux called a waiter and had him bring another.

So it was arranged that André Malraux should write me a letter of introduction to Bergamin at the Embassy. I became excited. I thought: now my efforts will be rewarded. At this moment Malraux, and with him people from all over the earth, people of dignity and conscience and responsibility, people girded with a spirit of heroism and sacrifice, buttress the Madrid Government and are resisting the tyranny of fascism with their very bodies and souls. I told myself over and over again that now I too would add my pen to the struggle.

It having been decided that I would go to Spain, the topic of conversation shifted. I blurted out: "Have you seen Gide lately?"

The question passed my lips without any forethought. I had been thinking, while enroute to France, that as soon as I got to Paris I would go to see Malraux and then Gide. So the question was natural. Furthermore, since *Journey to the U. S. S. R.* had been published, I had been anxious to know how matters stood between my two friends, especially how Malraux regarded Gide's stand on Spain. I quote again from my Paris Diary. What Malraux had to say is an important channel to understanding the positions of the two men at that time and during the great war which was to follow.

When I asked "have you seen Gide lately?" he answered: "No, not for a while." I went on: "If I go to Spain, I'd like to see him before I leave. Last year I translated his *New Pages of My Journal* and *Journey to the U. S. S. R.*"

"Did you translate *Journey to the U. S. S. R.*?" I could see in his face that he was wondering what I thought of it.

"Well, what did you think of it?"

"I have not yet been to the Soviet Union. I do not have enough conviction to criticize what Gide wrote when I myself have never actually seen the place However, when you stop to think of it, always assuming that you believe in his sincerity, I feel that you can agree with much of what he has to say. Also I do feel that there are things which cause us to think rather coldly about the actual situation in the Soviet Union."

"Yes, there are sections where you can agree with him" Malraux began to talk, using my own words. "However, depending on the position of the one who looks at it the meaning changes. What I mean to say is that an historical fact is something that is alive; this is viewing history as something that moves ever onward. Or, in other words, there are those who go along with the tide of history, those who are left behind, and those who stand aside to watch; so, according to these various stands will the points of agreement differ."

"I can understand your viewpoint. I will of course refuse to agree with those who are left behind or are merely watching history flow by. But no matter how much I may be in the midst of things I will not attempt to get involved in anything that is irrational or asinine. 'I will risk all for the sake of attaining my goal!' This sort of reasoning does not suit me at all. Not from the reactionary point of view, but from a progressive one. In other words, from a revolutionary standpoint, one can criticize the Soviet Union as it is today, and I believe that such criticism is only natural"

Had I spoken too frankly? The thought flashed through

my mind . . . The Soviet Union had been for Malraux the manifestation of a dream. It seemed to me that his secret desire was to see that country as one of the world's great Powers. But even Malraux, were his innermost thoughts laid bare, would probably find much to criticize about the Soviet Union today. On that score he would probably not differ from Gide.

This should be easy to understand if one knows the man's patterns of thought as displayed in *The Conqueror* and *The Royal Way*, if one is familiar with his Nietzschean individualism and inflexible non-conformism. Even if one considers the development of his thought from *Man's Fate* to *Days of Wrath* (this brings him closer to a Communistic humanism), it is still impossible to conjure up an image of a Malraux who might indulge in political expediency or compromise. As I observed in my diary at that time, the problem he encountered, in the face of a full frontal attack on International Fascism, was that of what is going to be man's fate: will the spirit of man live or will it be crushed? To put it more sharply, life or death as a human entity was for André Malraux the stake of battle. He was fighting a sanguinary struggle to protect those human values which meant most to him.

In spite of the fact that such powerful fascist countries as Germany and Italy were giving aid to Franco, the democratic states were not only refraining from participating but were trying to implement the decision of the Non-Intervention Committee at the expense of the Madrid Government. It is probably only natural then that Malraux, placed in a position such as this, a position of great responsibility, should gradually turn toward the United States, Mexico, and the U. S. S. R. Standing in the center of an adventure of immense historical significance, making decisions as the arbiter of Life and Death, he could not indulge in gratuitous acts. Just as he impatiently awaited weapons and money for military supplies from comrades in England and France, he had also to

await aid from comrades in America, Mexico, and the Soviet Union.

Even as the French working classes and progressive intellectuals were shouting the slogan: "Send planes to Spain! Avions pour l'Espagne!" Malraux waited tensely for every additional plane from beyond the Pyrenees. He waited for each additional bullet, each additional machine gun When you consider all this you can probably understand how he felt. You can realize what he meant by "those who go along with the tide of history." And from the same standpoint you can also understand the significance of his reference to Gide: "There are sections where you can agree with him." But at the same time one can comprehend why he was so noncommittal on the subject of the Soviet Union, or about Gide's *Journey*. In a word, Malraux had decided this was not the time for him to comment or to criticize.

I must add yet another thing. That is the relationship between Malraux and Communism. It is a fact that the Malraux who wrote *Days of Wrath* comes close to the Communist line. However, it is hard to say with any exactness whether this Communism is of the Russian variety or not. Malraux' basis of thought and life is what we might call a "pantheistic Weltanschauung" running from Pascal through Kierkegaard to Nietzsche. He lives not as an individual dedicated to the progress of the world but as the reverse—as a man who tries to change the world for the sake of man's progress. This may suggest his concept of Communism. But even if there is a wide gap between Communism as it is practiced in the Soviet Union and that embraced by Malraux, we must admit frankly that his trust in the future of the Soviet Union brushes aside such things as apprehension or fear. I should say that this trust and hope is what has caused Malraux to take an attitude of "silence and cooperation" toward the U. S. S. R.

Malraux had sat quietly for some minutes. Now he said: "Insofar as Gide has taken a position for cultural idealism,

which he has reached through the development of his individualism, I can agree with him. There are many points on which he is right. However, in the world today, no matter how pure it may be, the ideal that is an end in itself does not have any force. Furthermore, Gide's knowledge of the Soviet Union is in large measure secondhand. His anti-Sovietism is expressed strongly in his *Afterthoughts on the U. S. S. R.* What I am saying is that such persons as Gide and Thomas Mann try unceasingly to find the way of wisdom; they are the men of *sagesse*" Again he subsided into silence.

I sensed a shade of irony in his words. I do not know, looking at it from a narrow political standpoint, how much of a stimulus to action Gide's words were. But the "cold reflection" of his writings was truly meaningful and, I believe, influential. And when we consider that, going beyond the limitations of such things as ideals or politics, he has made those who have given any thought to the future of the world and the fate of man think even more seriously about them, his role obviously has been significant. And this sort of role is not the type which would ordinarily be assumed by the men of *sagesse*. Could we not also say that because Gide did not possess one iota of political ambition his words and actions would have that much more influence in politics?

I can say with honesty that I understand well the viewpoints of both Malraux and Gide. I can respect the views of both. I have ties of the heart with both.

III

[Although Kyo Komatsu had published translations of Gide's works in Japan and had carried on an extensive correspondence with the author, the two had never met. About the middle of October, after seeing Malraux off to Spain, Komatsu decided to call on Gide. They met in Gide's apartment on rue Vaneau on October 22, 1937. For Komatsu this was "a sacred experience." His intellectual and moral growth had

been profoundly influenced by Gide, and he compared his feelings on approaching the great man to those "of a pilgrim visiting a Holy Place."—W.R.F.]

"*Bon jour.*" The casually outstretched hand was hairy and large. I shook it hard; it was soft and warm. His attitude was one of warm friendliness, and in spite of its serenity his face held an undeniable dignity. His head was completely bald. His face was a face which had a healthy glow to it. I stood there saying nothing.

"Monsieur Gide, I am happy to meet you. I have been waiting to see you ever since I was in Japan."

"I myself am happy to meet you."

"There is nothing more I can wish for than to see you in such good health."

There was a power growing upon me from the depths which was hard to translate into words. Not one which overwhelms, but rather the reverse—it seemed to envelop me in sympathy. I felt that power like electricity. For the past many years, in that tempestuous life in Japan, the existence of Gide was for me like a great light which glowed in the darkness of a world filled with stupidity, wretchedness, and vulgarity. The gratitude and praise which I wanted to offer to that great light I could now express in only the most common of greeting words.

He spoke: "When did you arrive in Paris? Have you found a good place to live? Oh, so you are still staying at a hotel. Try and get a comfortable apartment, I would suggest, and take it easy. Since you have been here before for a long time, you probably have many friends among the French, so you shouldn't have much trouble . . ."

His words were like the usual social conversation one hears, but they were not exactly the same; they indicated a sensitive humanity. Even while answering to these words I took careful note of Gide's bearing and expression (or rather, I did not forget to do so). "The climate in Paris not being so good, I

happen to have caught a cold from which I am suffering. Furthermore, I am that type of person who cannot get any work done when he is troubled that way, which is very unfortunate." He sniffed audibly.

On his ample person he wore a brown homespun with wide stripes; finished off with a pair of woolen slippers, his appearance was reminiscent of an English country gentleman. In *If It Die*, he writes that from his father he carries Norman blood while from his mother he gets that of the South French. However, there is definitely something suggestive of the Anglo-Saxon that shows through his Norman features. Probably his beginnings as a Protestant, which more than anything else stresses discipline and introspection, worked on his countenance and expression. Just the same, he looked much more affectionate (as if a kindly pastor) than I had imagined he would be from his photographs. There was no sign of an attempt to search, pursue, or judge a person from a superior level on the part of Gide. What a natural human being! Also, what a person to make one aware of the depth of his simplicity. I have never before met anyone who gave me quite that same impression.

If he had not been so bald, seventy-ish Gide would probably not be taken for more than in his fifties. His well built and strong body appeared to be glowing with the physical health gained by severe discipline and concentration of mind.

His thick and dark eyebrows partly hidden by a pair of tortoise shell Harold Lloyd glasses, with his clear brown eyes and broad facial structure which somehow had Asian characteristics; the wrinkles in his cheeks which carved deep diagonal ditches each time he smiled; the tiny wrinkles around his eyes thinly streaking; nicely fleshy large nose; thin lips set in a straight line; lips which Wilde had bitterly mocked as never to have lied; he made me think somehow of one of my friends. Sei Ito's face came suddenly to my mind. Especially his expression when he smiled. A clever child's

face, if this sort of description is permitted; that term would be suited to Ito as well as to Gide. If Gide's countenance could be shrunk to Japanese size he might look like Ito; this was what he made me think. Within this one individual the untamed character of a Man of Nature and the sensitivity of a City Man showed an amazing harmony.

"I try to be a commonplace man as much as possible." These are the words of the greatest individualist of our times, Gide. I do not look upon them as a reverse remark or as a pretense of modesty. The miracle is that as he tries to be commonplace he becomes a very special person. I have never met another who was quite so naturally commonplace. In general, eight or nine out of ten Frenchmen have a tendency to stand out in a crowd, or to show themselves off constantly as particular individuals. It may be conscious or unconscious; but at times it even takes on the nature of an intolerable intellectualism. For Gide I would say that does not exist. Perhaps he had a period like that; possibly so. But today there is definitely something non-French about him. His natural way of living is to be as he is without ornament.

I have often heard of that which is called the "State of Zen." What always impressed me about it was the artificiality of its seeming pose, as if it tried to show repression of feelings and emotion, and this unnatural, unhuman coercion was to me most unpleasant. However, while meeting with Gide, I got the feeling that perhaps within his "naturalness of spirit" could be found the "State of Zen." To think that I should be reminded of Zen by meeting Gide! This is quite extraordinary! Is it not that the smallest thing has become sacred and tended to become beautiful? Is it not that I have become the victim of the magic of the optical illusion of one's preconceived opinion called "A Great Person?" There may be such criticism, but it is not at all true, so I will reply. No matter how great may be my reverence for the man Gide, I am not the kind of person to get excited to the point of

forgetting my own eyes. And furthermore, Gide is not the kind of person to cause one such pressure, excitement, or such a mental lapse. In other words, "the magic of the great" is an article of no relation to Gide. He is the exact reverse of anything like that. Without forcing respect or love from others, my opinion is, the one who nevertheless can still win love and respect is a truly great person. Gide happens to be one of those rare persons.

In coming into contact with Gide, within the time during which we had but exchanged so few words, this was one of the precious things that I learned.

When I took a cigarette from my pocket in order to smoke, Gide took the English cigarettes from the table and offered one to me. He also put one to his lips and was flipping the pages of the magazines on the table carelessly when, "Look, the *France-Japon* has just arrived." So saying he showed me the copy. "Do you know this magazine?" The *France-Japon* is a small-sized, pretty, cultural magazine sent out by the Paris office of the South Manchurian Railway. Since I did not know much about the contents of this magazine as yet, I said: "I haven't looked at it yet but I have heard and know of the name." Then, as if he had suddenly remembered, he changed the subject. "Twice or three times I have thought of going to your country. There was just the right opportunity some time ago, but unfortunately I let the chance escape me."

"What if you tried to go there some time in the near future?"

"No, no, it would be too much to try to attempt that from now on."

Was it because of his age? Or is it that when one becomes this old, one's curiosity ceases to stimulate? It would probably mean too much exertion for him; but if only he could come! So I thought, as if chasing a dream. I said within myself: "Wouldn't you try to come to Japan? There are many friends you have not yet met, many of your readers who will wel-

come you with sincere respect and warm feelings. If you could but see our present day Japan, you would in all probability, since you are so sensitive, realize that although Japan from the standpoint of civilization resembles Europe so closely, on the other hand it carries an entirely different kind of fate from that of the West. For Japan, the copying of Europe was, in short, the mirror in which we discovered our reflections. Now at last, the birth cry of Japan is starting to be heard. Just as the intellects in Japan have had much to gain from you, there might also be something for you to gain from Japan. You are still in good health and possess it to an enviable degree. If you should come, I shall be glad to be your guide" All this I could not bring myself to say openly; probably because it was such an impossible dream.

"I hear both from you and from my friends that my writings are much read by your countrymen. Could you tell me why?"

"From the standpoint that there is much that we Japanese learn from it?"

"Yes, from that standpoint if you wish."

"This is only my own opinion. However, according to my way of thinking, I feel that you have most acutely taught our Japanese literary scholars, those who respect ideas and especially our young people, what the "spirit of criticism" is. Of course this "spirit of criticism" which I mention now has been taught us up till now by literary men and thinkers from other countries, but never before have we had it brought to us in as live a fashion as through you, I believe. This, however, is my own individual opinion."

Gide, who had been leaning on the table, chin in hand—a pose familiar in many of his photographs—and listening to all this, nodded. "Is that so? If that is the case I am glad," he smiled.

I have these days again been looking over Gide's *Fruits of the Earth*, and I wanted to tell him how much strength I have

been able to derive from the passion and the mystic love toward Nature and toward Life itself which overflows from each page; no, not only myself but how many of the young people of Japan have been saved from "sterility of spirit" and "premature despair." I know of a great many such youths. For them *Fruits of the Earth* was a new Bible. Gide did not just teach us about the "spirit of criticism" but also about "the naturalness of passion and freedom." We must not forget that he also taught us that.

These ideas raged in my breast, but now, with Gide before me, I was hard pressed for words. I told myself not to be timid and opened my mouth.

"I recall quite clearly that your works were first introduced into Japan in 1923 beginning with *Strait is the Gate*, translated by Yoshio Yamanouchi. For a while your writings were being read by only a certain segment of the people. However, the time when you started to attract the Japanese intellectuals was when you, who took such a stand for individualism and freedom and were known as the apostle of the spirit of criticism, suddenly came out boldly in support of Communism. This shocked and provoked a reaction from both those who knew and those who did not know of your literary world and that of our world of thinkers. For us your action could be taken as the sign of a great change in an era."

In the eyes of the young intelligentsia in Japan who were under the influence of the heavy pressure of a consciousness of social problems and were struggling within the maelstrom of this awareness, it seemed that Gide, whom they had taken to be living in an ivory tower, had at last stood up and chosen his road.

Gide listened to my words with occasional nods of the head and "Is that so" and "I see." I have often heard from those who knew Gide well that there was never another like him who was quite as good and interested a listener, and I have to agree. Probably curiosity also played a part; however, I was

touched by that attitude of heart which did not show the shadow of irony and which tried to be so understanding. Since I had not thought I could talk in so intimate a fashion I was all the happier.

"However, leaving this matter for the moment, if I were to speak on the understanding accorded your works, I would admit to being quite skeptical. I think at times that the degree of understanding is very slight, even for such books as *Lafcadio's Adventures* and *The Counterfeiters*."

"That may be true. Even among the French it can be said that there are few who understand *The Counterfeiters*." So spoke Gide. He showed neither pride nor disgruntlement in the fact that there were few who could understand. The smoke from the cigarette in his hands rose and curled. His words sent a shaft into my breast. To what extent do I who am telling him this understand, too? As a matter of fact, was it not just recently that I myself discovered these works? While these thoughts ran through my mind, I continued.

"I wished to tell you that your *Journey to the U. S. S. R.*, which I translated, has given a great jolt to the Japanese intellectuals. Through these people a reaction has occurred which I believe has reached the level of the people. It could even be said that it has had more effect than in France."

"When you say 'jolt' you mean" Gide raised his head and perked up his ears.

"It could be compared to the shock received when cold water is poured over the head. Faced with the reality of the Soviet Union the 'spirit of criticism' which we just mentioned suddenly awakened. . . ."

"Is that so. Was that your interpretation?" For a while Gide seemed to be lost in silence; then: "In reference to the actuality in the Soviet Union, I simply wrote honestly the things I had seen and was made to think. That was all."

The clamor of the voices of approval and disapproval which were raised against *Journey to the U. S. S. R.* and

Afterthoughts on the U. S. S. R., which came later; the political crossed swords, the polemics, the propaganda and the counter propaganda; also the criticism which he himself had directed against all this, and the refutation it had caused, how it must have wearied him both in soul and body. Since he is that rare thing, a man of strong conscience, he probably felt all the more the responsibility for the attitude he took as well as for what he said. I could imagine how much time he had spent and the mental effort he had put into assembling the documents and other materials, to say nothing of the investigations and the analysis. He himself has admitted honestly that such things as politics were outside his field. It seemed to me that it must have taken tremendous effort, and restraint, and weariness of spirit for one who had made such a statement to express himself in a field other than his own. Now I too was silent. After a while Gide broke the quiet.

"Have you seen a newsreel movie since coming here?" Gide's scheme of conversation resembled jumping from stepping stone to stepping stone. When I nodded, he went on: "I saw one newsreel lately at a nearby theatre, and it seems to me that the eyes of the people in the world are chasing after a monstrosity wretched fate. . . . Just looking at those scenes of battle in Shanghai. . . ."

I myself had seen the special feature on the Shanghai Incident at a certain newsreel theatre only a few days beforehand, and the misery of it was enough to make one want to turn away. The picture was like most of the Incident news that we get out here, clearly siding with the Chinese, and there were close-ups of the pain and misery of the Chinese people, and it was slanted to appeal to the moral sentiments of the spectators. I wondered what Gide would say. What I felt on coming to Paris was the undeniably anti-Japanese feelings many of the French people displayed. I heard much hostile criticism of Japan. It seemed especially widespread among the

intellectuals. There were those I knew of who held a hysterical hate toward us; there were those who disagreed in a most subjective and simple-minded manner with everything the Japanese said or did: no cold objective thinking or actual observations or historical knowledge of the Far Eastern problem. Confronted with the preconceived opinions and emotional theories of those who try to solve the problem with such simple and crudely subjective views, for me who knew how futile and ineffective it would be to try to argue Japan's stand, there was nothing to do but to receive their remarks with silence. Even I, who had strong reactions toward the China policy of my own country, could not help but be irritated by the anti-Japanese feeling which went too far from the mark in understanding and lack of goodwill, and at times even led to infuriation. However, I wondered how Gide felt about it. He opened his mouth slowly.

"There is no doubt that it is a dreadful fact. However, we must think this over coolly; in other words consider it once more in its entirety. Before we criticize that which is now taking place in the Far East, or pronounce judgment on it, we must first of all get to know Japan as well as China. I must frankly confess that I have no knowledge of things like these. As I look upon it, however, many Frenchmen who are theorizing on the situation have equally little knowledge. But even one as poorly informed as myself can sense instinctively, can understand, the historical national fate which drives a country which is poor within, like Japan, to stretch outward."

This objective critical type of thinking, so different from the humanitarian sentimentality or idealistic dogmatism which could frequently be found among the left wingers or liberals in France, was exceedingly like Gide, I thought. Could it be that Gide said this just out of deference to my feelings as a Japanese? No, this sort of concern, as anybody would know, would be very unlike Gide. . . .

As I have noted, I was drawn to the problem of Spain from

the time that I was in Japan. Since coming overseas, my unrest and my doubts had begun to grow. Valery and Mauriac are sympathizers of the Madrid Government. On the other side, Claudel clearly supports Franco. Gide happens to be standing on the side of Madrid even as Valery; at the same time, however, he is strongly opposed to the policy of the Third International, in other words the policy of Stalin. On that point he has argued fiercely with Ilya Ehrenberg, and he has become somewhat distant with Malraux as well. This sort of thing I heard from my old friends on reaching Paris, so I had been thinking of making sure of this point myself when I saw Gide. After all, I had been wondering when I could get to Madrid, and I wanted to know more of the actual situation in Spain. This was all the more reason for wanting to know Gide's judgment and views.

"The next thing I wanted to ask you about was the problem of Spain. I have been much concerned about it ever since I was in Japan; but tell me, what is really going on there? Since my arrival in Paris I have heard so many different things that I am even more confused now than I was when I was in Japan. I had thought that the inner conflict in the Madrid Government, the trial and imprisonment of Anarchists, Syndicalists, and Trotskyites were all rootless counter-propaganda on the part of Franco. Now I am surprised to find that all this was true."

"I am afraid that it is all true."

"Then were they counter-revolutionaries who were bribed by Franco? It is difficult for me to have to believe that."

"I do not think so myself, either."

"I would very much like to go to Spain myself and see the reality of this country with my own eyes."

"At the present moment it would probably be very difficult, no matter which side you take."

"On that subject, I have spoken with Malraux, but he has promised to take me by plane to either Madrid or Barcelona."

"In that case the story's different. Speaking of Malraux, when did you see him?"

"Just ten days ago. Two or three days after he returned from Spain."

"Did he say anything about Spain then?"

"He spoke of various things, but among them what I thought was important was the fact that the policy of removing the volunteers, which was being considered by the non-intervention committee, would be acted upon in the near future, and that would mean the dispersion of the International Volunteer Brigade. This is something which makes me feel very uneasy. However, Malraux also said that the Spanish Republican Army has made much improvement in its training as an army, compared to last year, and that it has begun to consolidate its strength."

"Did he say he would be going back there in the near future? (When I nodded he went on.) Well, we'll leave it at that. Probably it will be some time then before he will be able to complete his present writing (*Man's Hope*). . . ."

"He was saying that he would try to complete it before starting out for Spain."

"Could he complete it that fast?" . . . Gide closed his lips for a second, and then, wrinkling his brow and dropping his voice, he said: "I will say this since you are his friend . . . His present status is extremely delicate." Gide's voice was soaked with sad affection. He said nothing more. However, I could tell that whatever he wanted to say indicated quite an involved situation. But his words were not surprising to me. I knew from the stories of my friends that a gulf has grown up between Gide and Malraux. Again, I felt that I could well understand why, as Gide said, Malraux was in a delicate and difficult situation.

It isn't that there does not exist a distinct gap between the earlier position of Malraux and his political stand today. The author of *The Conqueror* and *The Royal Way* was from head

to toe a non-conformist in politics. This man was now taken for a supporter of Stalinism. Against this, Gide, since his travels in the Soviet Union, has made clear his anti-Stalin stand. I was unable to hear from Malraux' own lips his opinion on Stalinism; but it is possibly only natural that a clash should occur between Malraux' stand and that of Gide. Malraux' view of the world demands a certain amount of sacrifice on the part of the individual, which probably meant nothing more than one to be paid for by dangerous compromise. Furthermore, such a sacrifice and the price paid would not result in help to mankind.

Gide, who makes the spirit of criticism the bulwark for the *raison d'être* of the intelligentsia, as against Malraux, who tries to add to the mission of the intelligentsia that of active leadership—here would probably lie the difference in individuality between the two, but at the same time it could be that each would represent a different epoch. I, while I hold sympathy for them both, will have to confess here that I am torn between them. This distress, this hesitation, this consciousness of contradiction, and yet I have to go tottering through all their respective vibrations.

I looked toward Gide suddenly. His gaze was fixed on a point in the air; he looked as if he were staring at an elusive question mark. This was no product of my imagination. His was truly the figure of one who was being possessed by something, and who was in distress. He looked toward me, and then said in words which echoed heavily, "We live in truly uncertain times!"

How true! To hear these words from Gide's own lips. It was a simple statement, to the point and clear-cut, and it struck sharply at my breast. The word "apprehension" hit me with great vividness. However, in Gide's words I could not sense the slightest impression of hopelessness or abandonment toward the world of man; on the other hand, one could not help but feel Gide's inner faith, which came about through

the unusual amalgamation of Nietzscheism and Christianity, that does not accept the destruction of man; and this seemed to radiate from his person. . . .

IV

I believe it was about the beginning of November that I received from Malraux the letter of introduction he had promised me to José Bergamin. (I cannot say definitely when it was because *Paris Diary* [this was the greater part of my diary], which had been published upon my return to Japan, was confiscated when I was arrested by the Japanese police the day after the start of the Pacific War, and one volume was never returned to me.) At any rate, I remember that I got that letter of introduction quite a bit later than I had hoped. A few days after I saw Malraux I had dinner with him at his home, and soon after he left Paris by plane. In the letter Malraux, in an effort to explain my ideas and my political position, said that I was much like the American writer, Ernest Hemingway. What he probably meant was that we were both fighting liberals. . . .

José Bergamin was a pale, melancholy, lanky, laughterless man. He was a poet of Spain, who showed in his noble mien both passion and sadness. I had not yet read his poems, but Malraux looked upon him as the representative poet of modern Spain. In our first conversation Bergamin asked me various questions about Japan. He did not hide his antipathy for Japanese militarism or fascism, but he claimed a good understanding of and liking for Japanese culture. As I talked with him I could see that he was brilliant, sensitive, a fine gentleman, and at the same time a truly human being.

I told him of my request for a visa, for permission to stay in Madrid, and for the conveniences which would attach to my status as a writer with the troops. He already knew from Malraux' letter of introduction what sort of person I was,

and tapping my arm he cheerfully told me that this would be a simple thing to do. And he grasped my hand, saying that he sincerely appreciated my spirit of fraternal love and cooperation for the Republican Government of Spain and the People's Army. . . .

However, when I came to the Spanish Embassy at the appointed date and hour, the answer I got was most vague. They neither gave me a visa nor did they say they would not give me one. I told them angrily that I wanted a more definite answer, or at least an explanation. Certainly the order from Madrid must be either a clear "yes" or a "no".

The official in charge was taken aback at my outburst and answered with hasty unpreparedness: "We don't know the details, but it does look as if your entry into the country will not be permitted for the time being." I went home feeling puzzled and baffled. When I saw my wife, who had been preparing baggage for my departure, I took it out on her. What a stupid situation!

The following day I again saw Bergamin at Fouquet's. He certainly got it from me, the anger caused by the unpleasantness of doubt and ill feeling. The poet listened to my bitter complaint with a gloomy face. He spoke little. He didn't even attempt an excuse.

"Why is my entry into your country held up this way? Does this mean I'm not trusted? And furthermore what about Malraux? Apparently even he is not trusted." I just managed to keep from adding that this would mean that Bergamin himself, who had backed me, was not completely trusted. I was tremendously agitated, and I could feel the tremble in my voice.

"My principal reason for coming all the way from Japan was to go to Madrid and throw myself bodily into the fight against the Fascists. That you know. . . . Malraux has accepted responsibility for me. And you know also that it is Malraux, who is devoting his body and soul to the cause of the Repub-

lic, who is the man responsible for the International Volunteer Air Force."

At this Bergamin, who had been listening in silence, opened his mouth and said slowly and laboriously: "I can understand your anger. I feel with you on every point. Because of that I, as a Spaniard, feel all the more deeply about your kind concern and thus do I suffer for it. And from the standpoint of Spanish chivalry it is indeed a shameful thing, this turning one's back to the brotherly friendship of a foreigner. However, speaking frankly, politics is like a deep ditch; one cannot fathom just from the surface what may lie at the bottom. This may sound like an excuse, but the politics of Spain today are extremely complicated. I've given a good deal of thought to this matter lately, and I wonder whether your problem may have arisen out of that fact."

"Do you mean that certain aspects of Spanish politics are not as the people would wish?" I asked brusquely. What came to me in that instant was the feeling that Madrid was moved by a political force that was invisible, unmentioned, and overwhelming. Before this time I had heard and read that such things might be so, but I had never dreamed that they might stand in the way of my journey.

". . . I cannot say it that definitely—not being in a position to do so—but it is a fact that there are an increasing number of things about which we can do nothing. And all on account of politics. . . ."

"And what about my problem? Tell me the truth, whatever it is," I asked in the hope of opening some kind of door.

"It is sad, but there is a faction in the Madrid Government which, if you mention Japanese to them, have the idea that all Japanese are militarists and fascists. Everybody believes that the three countries, Germany, Italy, and Japan, are a Trinity of Fascism who are Franco's support."

"Wait a moment. In the International Volunteer Brigade on the Madrid side, are there not both Germans and Italians?

Even among those Germans whom I have come to know since arriving in Paris there are a number of such persons. These are clear-cut anti-fascists. There are Germans and Italians who go to Spain and fight against Franco, and Germans and Italians who are supporting him. In the same way, I may be a Japanese, but on the matter of hating fascism I don't take a back seat to anyone! And this is true of other Japanese too. There are many like me in Japan. One can never say that all Japanese are fascists. No, never. Even though fascism may be the stronger, the force that resists it is not a weak one. You foreigners know too little about this situation."

"That is true. They know too little. What is worse, they don't even try to learn more. No, even worse, there are instances where they deliberately avoid learning more. Honestly, until I heard of you I had the feeling that all Japanese were unredeemable fascists. However, when you left Japan you wrote a fearless piece of reportage in one of our magazines, and it altered my thoughts radically. . . . It is, therefore, all the more painful for me to see you today and to have to tell you about this situation."

I was silent a moment and then spoke with decision: "Mr. Bergamín, I think I understand. To put it in a word, is it not true that my entry into Spain has been made impossible by a certain situation? Well, let me say that I am deeply grateful for all your assistance thus far. And furthermore, this has not changed my support of the Spanish Republic. The only thing I would like to add is this: even if Japan should become totally fascist, all Japanese will not be fascists. And I shall keep myself an anti-fascist Japanese to the end. That is all."